

VALISNERIA.

WALISNERIA,
or
A Midsummer Days Dream

A TALE IN PROSE,

By M. R. Puffer.



She spread her wings for a palotto, and dipped her penoifi in the
burning spots where the sun had made his sweet alliance "

Page 112

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PREFACE.

IN offering the following pages to a larger public than that for which they appear to have been originally designed, I feel as if I should be infringing the customary courtesies between Author or Editor, and Reader, if I did not introduce them to the notice of the latter, by a few Prefatory remarks.

That which makes this duty the less easy in the present case, is my determination neither distinctly to deny, nor wholly to avow, any share in the authorship of the little work for which my name stands sponsor. Whether the writer be indeed that woman full of years, who draws from the depository of her own experience as pretended, or whether she be one who, to give something more of weight to her slight teaching,

borrow the cloak and hood of age, as she would fain have borrowed its wisdom, this is my secret, and it is my whim to keep it. But ladies, old or young, have ever at hand a thousand reasons to bring to the aid of their caprices, when called for. One of my own in this instance, and the only one I adduce, because I think it sufficient, is, that in this attempt at mystification, I follow *precedent*. No one will require to be reminded how, in the annals of Literature, this endeavour to pique the curiosity of the patient public, has been consecrated by use: how, since the time of Scott, that oracle who spoke by turns through the mouth of an "Old Mortality," of a Jedediah Cleishbotham, and a Captain Clutterbuck, down to that of "Mary Powell" and the "Ladye Adolie," it has been the practice to abuse the public ear with specious untruths which it has rarely taken the trouble to unravel. I so far depart from this time-honoured custom, as to practise no direct double-dealing upon the reader; the author may be the aged Mrs. D'Eyncourt, or may be the one who now addresses him.

I make no assertion on either head ; all I will venture confidently to affirm is, that be it the former, or be it the latter, she takes so little glory to herself in the performance, that the one who shares in her unpreferred claim need feel no compunction at the circumstance. Courteous reader, I have done. As the author of this little book, I might commend it to your charity ; as its Editor, I might exercise my own, bringing into relief its supposed merits, and palliating its errors and shortcomings. But from the neutral stand I have chosen to take, I can neither do the one nor the other ; I can but bid you “ God’s speed ” in your progress through its pages, and hope that you may not in one breath be disposed to vote the elder lady tedious, and the younger lady trite.

EMILY PFEIFFER.

Wandsworth,
January 9. 1837.



VALISNERIA.

CHAPTER I.

“As some hoar wanderer at eve
May pause, and twilight gathering on,
May seek the devious course to weave
Which he hath trod since morning's dawn:
As backward o'er the far blue hills
And distant plains he turns his gaze,
And still the shadowy prospect fills
With sylvan halts, or rugged ways:
Like him I turn to life's young day,
My failing sense by memory led,
Through those calm monotones which lay
O'er scenes whence passion's light has fled.”

I AM an old woman, and it is “an old wife's story” that I am about to set down at the request of some friends who have got to love it, as they have heard it indulgently from my lips, and to fear that they may hear it no more. For I am, as I said, an old woman, although I was a young one when the experiences to which my story relates befel me. Be not afraid, ye who, knowing me, are aware of the ripeness of my years; or the few who, not knowing me, may fall

upon this announcement. I am conscious that prolixity is the characteristic of age, that in spite of the harvest which thins the ripe corn from the field, there are ever more aged tongues to wag than young ears that are willing to listen; and that the temptations to him who wields the pen are greater than to him who speaks with the tongue,—for “paper is patient,” says the proverb. But I make here a resolve, at the outset of my story, to linger in no bye-paths which may open before me, and to give only such a summary of my personal history as seems necessary for the proper presentation of that phantasy which I have undertaken to record.

I was an only child, my parents both living. My father was a clergyman of the Established Church, but wealthy and independent beyond the wont of his order. The death of an elder brother, and of an uncle who possessed a considerable estate, both without children, caused the bulk of the family property to devolve upon him, when the influence of his connexions had already secured him an ample benefice, with the promise of future preferment. My father bore his honours, if such they may be said to have been, very meekly. I feel sure he had experienced no special call in his youth to the profession on which he had entered; but once fairly launched in the career, and habituated to the great duties it in-

volved, he was one of those men who find it easier to go forward than to turn back; and thus he remained a country gentleman and parish priest—the characters pleasantly and usefully blended—to the term of his natural life. Perhaps the only unfulfilled desire which was a frequent tenant of his unambitious mind, was the wish to travel and behold the humanity and the nature he so much loved, under other aspects in distant lands; but the gratification of this wish was rendered by circumstances too difficult of attainment. Among the foremost of these was the feeble health of my mother. An illness had succeeded my birth from which she had never wholly recovered, and although she was often able to join the domestic circle, and was ever cheerful and uncomplaining, she suffered much from a nervous languor, which demanded continual watchfulness and care. My dear, dear mother! I fancy I can see her now, with her benign face and lady air, and that look of graceful convalescence, which, with the frequent demand for little necessary attentions, impressed me from a child with the idea that she was a mortal wrought out of some porcelain clay of the earth superior to that of which all others were compacted. Besides my father, my mother, and myself, our family consisted of two other members: the first an elder sister of my mother's, who had taken up her place in our

household, when the health of the latter rendered it desirable that she should have with her a familiar and active companion; the second a young orphan cousin of my own, the child of my mother's half-brother, who at the period at which my story opens, had been for more than two years the recipient of the same kind care at the hands of my parents that they bestowed upon myself. It was not difficult to be kind to Mary. From the hour when she had first appeared in our midst, sick and sorry from the recent death of her father, my aunt was the only one of us who refused to enter into some little readjustment of my hitherto absorbing claims as an only child, so as to make her an equal partaker. This good aunt, homely herself in person and intellect, considered her brother-in-law the most distinguished of men, and his wife as the first of women; while I suspect she regarded me, the only living representative and chief earthly care of these beings so admired and endeared, with a partiality so full of loving awe, that I appeared in her eyes as one who united all that was excellent and worthy of honour in both my parents, with the freshness and vague promise which belonged to my own earlier years. With a person of this character it was perhaps not to be wondered at that the charms and graces and touching position of the new comer, while they inspired her with affection

and sympathy, never surprised her for a moment out of the warm first place in her regard which she had devoted long since to myself.

My country sports, my pony, my pet animals, all the resources of an only and cherished child, were beginning to be insufficient to the young spirit which yearned for some congenial human sympathy, when my ever friendly stars sent me as a companion my gentle cousin Mary. I had known the longings of an unsatisfied desire just so long as enabled me to appreciate my good fortune when it came. My cousin was some years older than myself, but youth is ever aspiring, and this only enhanced the charm I promised myself in her companionship; for I felt myself to be drawn nearer to the enchanting period when all golden promises were to be realised by an association with one who was already ripe for their fulfilment. It was feared that Mary, a neglected girl, would have been found wayward and idle; but she was pronounced by all, before many days, to be gentle and loveable beyond what they had ventured to hope; in my eyes she was a miracle of dignity and beauty, insomuch that I cannot at this moment think of the Mary, — now in the land of the blessed, and whom I have known in later years as a staid matron with lovely girls of her own, — but as the fair, serene, and graceful apparition which dawned upon my girlish fancy. In

the first two days of our acquaintance, I had related to her every circumstance which I thought could be of interest in my life, and had painted my inward workings, and still half-childish aspirations, with the same free and faithful hand as if I had revealed them to another self. Mary listened with an attentive ear, but when I paused for want of more to relate, and hoped that I should become in my turn the recipient of the like confidence on her part, she was silent. I stole a look at her face as we walked side by side round the old-fashioned garden. I know not what it was I felt, as my eyes fell upon that fair thoughtful countenance, took in its lineaments with the rapid perceptions of my age, and then withdrew themselves as if trespassing on some forbidden ground. Mary was pale, but she was at this time always pale; her large blue eyes had something of physical languor in them, still their gaze was calm and stedfast; there was nothing of doubt to be read there, nothing of eager hope, — they met you full when you spoke. What was it that I felt now as they turned in further inquiry upon me? It could only be that those thoughtful eyes had read some pages in life, which had been hidden from my own; that they were the eyes of a woman who had tasted experience and looked upon sorrow in many forms; who had struggled, and perhaps conquered, while I, was myself but a child,

playing with toys upon the threshold of life. Of all that there was to do or to suffer for mortal man or woman in this world, I was to the full as ignorant as could be expected from my position: and yet there rose up within me, at sight of this sweet calm face of my cousin, a sort of mysterious prompting, full itself of a dread charm, and surrounding Mary with a halo of compassionate respect. I felt her immeasurably superior to myself, but I loved to feel her so, I hoped there might come a time when I too might suffer and combat, conquer for virtue's and honour's sake, or, in the prospect of dying some beautiful death, might feel myself worthy to weep with her. At present I dared not ask a word of all that I was burning to know, and on her side the confidence was not volunteered. It was not until long after that I learnt how the history of Mary's young life, and the sorrow which had surrounded it, were interwoven with the errors and follies, with the providence and misdeeds, of the parent whose loss she was mourning.

In enumerating the various members which composed our domestic circle, I now become conscious for the first time, that I have been guilty of an act of ingratitude in overlooking one to whom I was indebted for the modicum of erudite knowledge which was at that time deemed sufficient for a girl of my condition. The individual of

whose modest claims, I fear I was then, as now, ever too apt to be oblivious, was no other than my father's curate and my own instructor, William Norreys. This was a young man of some learning and much patience; whose rare movements in and about the house were, as noiseless as those of a shadow; who had the faculty nevertheless of never appearing at your side but when wanted to perform some service, or render some information which no other could afford so well; whose even soul and grave face appeared never to have been the theatre or witness to any passion more vehement than the love of books; who came and went unnoticed except as he might be made to subserve the more active wills around him, and into whose inner world of life and feeling, if such existed for him, I fear me no one had ever thought of inquiring. I treated him then with the off-hand impetuosity of a spoiled child; I think of him now as one who only wanted the ruder physical energies and worldly ambitions of his compeers, to have asserted a more honoured place among them. At Mary's own instance and entreaty she became, soon after her arrival at Oaken-shawes, a partaker in all my studies; thereby occasioning an increase to the cares of the curate, at which he expressed his unbounded satisfaction, as likely, by means of the emulation he was ever striving to excite, to tend to my greater advance-

ment in learning. It is probable that my progress, with the diligent example of my cousin before me, may have been such as to administer more encouragement to my teacher than he had heretofore received, but I am fain to confess that the industry and application were still wofully on Mary's side, and that I was so little affected by the admonitions of our instructor conveyed in trenchant contrasts drawn between us two, to my own disadvantage, that I generally fell to laughing heartily at my contemptuous efforts in the useless art of ornamental caligraphy placed side by side with my cousin's conscientious imitations, and ended by covering her sweet face with kisses in commendation of the industry which I admired, though not sufficiently to emulate. Mary on these occasions used to smile, and to look at her work with something of the weakness we acquire for anything which has cost us much in time or effort, but with a sort of deprecatory and half pained aspect, which indicated a doubt of the value of the result. The good curate, as if scandalised at the vehemence of my caresses,— which he nevertheless marked as they were in progress with an observant eye, — invariably at this point left the table, and restored the equilibrium of his mind in a long gaze at the landscape out of the window. In this way we passed our mornings, the only material variations being in the nature

of our studies ; for an hour in the afternoon we embroidered and sewed, backstitched and tentstitched, under the superintendence of my aunt; and at least two days in every week spent a couple of hours in the kitchen or still room, deep in the mysteries of pickles and syllabubs, cordials, confections, salves, washes, powders, and simple waters. It was curious to observe Mary's ignorance of these things, motherless and worse than fatherless as she had been, and to contrast it with the earnest, and, though gentle, self-dependent character, which had been developed under untoward circumstances. For the remainder of the day we did what we listed,—we walked, rode, visited the poor good people of the neighbouring villages, sat with and amused my mother, and read such books as were deemed suitable for us. My mother's illness assuming for a time a more alarming character, had prevented my cousin and myself from being introduced into society at the termination of Mary's period of mourning; so that this event, from that cause and one or two others in conjunction with it, had been delayed for nearly a year beyond the time at which it had been originally appointed to take place. My mother had now recovered from this severer indisposition, but we were all so happy in our peaceful life, that the subject had not yet recurred to us, when one day a young lady of my own age, just returned to the

neighbourhood from London with her mother, came to spend a day at Oakenshawes, and talked with such an air of superiority about the various scenes of fashion she had visited, the admirers she had rejected, and the books most in the mode that she had read, as to completely disturb the current of my ideas. I did not sigh so much for the world, and for the vain-flatterers of whom she spoke, whom I had the sense to perceive must be very empty impertinent coxcombs, but the books, the romances,—those presentments of a more beautiful, intense, and higher life than that which I had known for myself,—these it was that I longed to exchange for the “Speaker,” “Rasselas,” the “Whole Duty of Man,” and even with the beloved “Pilgrim’s Progress,” whose pages I had worn quite thin with the study of a life. I opened my wishes to my mother, and formally requested to be allowed to read “Pamela.” She did not look much surprised, but paused a moment to consider of her answer, when she told me that my request should be complied with, not perhaps in the particular case of “Pamela,” but there were many standard works in the library whose pages she would herself consult before delivering them for my perusal. With this assurance I flew down to that sanctuary of delights, and quickly returned with my arms full of a selection, the most promising that I could make in such a

moment of excitement; and before long I had left my mother to herself, with all my fate in her hands. Again and again in the course of that day did I find occasion to enter her room, and always discovered food for fresh hope in what I observed there, although I felt keenly the torments of delay. My mother, with the "Whole Duty of Man" lying open on her work-table, had one of the masterpieces of Fielding in her hand, and seemed as refreshed as I myself could have been by the change. When she appeared at dinner, and indulged in some discursive remarks upon literature in general, I longed but did not venture to ask what she thought of "Amelia" in particular, and felt again restored to confidence in my chance of shortly judging for myself; when going to wish her good night in her own room, I saw that the volume beside her had but the moment before been laid down. In the sanguineness of young hope I had imagined that this sort of supervision of the press which was being exercised for my benefit, was to have been a thing merely of fluttering leaves and flying glances, with an occasional note at some doubtful passage; the careful mastery of the whole which my mother thought it necessary to achieve, had never for a moment occurred to me; and in spite of my conviction that in the course of a few days all would be well, and the treasure

placed at my disposal, I felt the delay, aggravated as it was by my inability, in my present frame of mind, to turn my thoughts to any less exciting occupation, almost insupportably tedious. I was hovering about my mother as usual, when two days afterwards she drew near to the close of the third volume. I watched with furtive glances every leaf which turned, and was already in fancy in a land of dreams.

"My dear child, this is sad trash!" exclaimed my mother, becoming as I thought basely ungrateful, now that the entertainment provided by the author was approaching an end. "It is really after all sad trash," she resumed after a pause in which she had devoured the concluding pages, "and I am only glad I read it before I permitted you to do so. I must forbid your having anything to do with Fielding. The characters and incidents may be conceived with great justness, and I have no doubt they are so; and that part where poor dear Amelia is taken away is certainly very moving," -- I knew now that it must have been here that I had discovered my mother in tears -- "but I should be sorry to begin and read it over again, while this (pointing to the "Whole Duty of Man") I have read as many times as you have years over your head."

My mother as she spoke closed the still open volume of polemics, and turned away from it

to the window with a heavy sigh. I thought I detected in the sigh the weight of the weary hours the book had provided for her; but my baffled impatience was prompting me at that moment with many another pert suggestion, which happily, with the one I have named, I was enabled to keep to myself. I fancied that with the row of delightful volumes ranged with my mother's customary neatness across her *escritoire*, I too could have contented myself for one time with a single reading of "Amelia"; I thought;—but no matter what I thought—it is enough that I conquered my ill-humour, and picking out the smallest volume of the hoard I had brought my mother some days before, I again left her to herself, deep in a translation of the "Sorrows of Werther." My mother was a woman of very impressionable mind, and when she descended to dinner that day, there was a softness in her eyes, and a certain delicate strain of sentiment in her conversation, which, while it accorded well with the natural refinement of her manners and person, was seldom exhibited by her, and gave me a very high idea of the pleasures she was enjoying in the solitude of her chamber. She looked to my excited fancy, as one who had been conversing with spirits, and I longed for the moment when I might question them also. I calculated, from the relative size of the works, that the "Sorrows of Werther," could not occupy her

more than a day and a half; but in this I was mistaken, as also in the fond anticipation that I should be suffered to regale myself at the same source when she had ended. The "Sorrows of Werther," like Fielding's "Amelia," was pronounced, after the lapse of more than two days, to be unfit for the mental refection of so young a person as myself. My mistress addressed herself in turn to other books, at first, as she began to understand my impatience, merely skimming over the pages, but always seduced, ere she had proceeded far, into an attentive perusal of the whole. In this manner volume after volume was laid aside, well read by her, but pronounced unfit for me. On looking back through the lapse of years, I am struck with something very amiable in this almost girlish weakness of my mother, the calm routine of whose life and ordinary employments had left her thus fresh and open to impressions which are rarely very vivid except in youth. At the time, a dogged resignation to my fate was all I could attain to, but this I at last succeeded in realising so completely, that when my mother one day put into my hand a romance by an author whose very name is forgotten, and told me that I might read it, adding some, alas! unheeded, maternal cautions as to the degree of faith to be accorded to such pictures of life, I received the announcement with a surprise as unfeigned as my joy. I carried off my

new acquisition, resolving to read it where I should be likely to be undisturbed. • My thoughts hovered for a moment undecided between a shady arbour in the garden and my own room, but settled themselves at last upon the latter. Mary, whose reading before she came to Oakenshaws had been left to her own choice, had no desire to share in my new pleasures, but preferred the books of instruction, — the histories and biographies of eminent men — which she had found difficult of attainment in her former home. I entered my world of enchantment then alone.

Who, when young as I was, has not felt the magic of this world of books? Has not yielded himself up, and followed with suspended breath the mazes through which they have lead him, tracing out for the grown child no longer contented with the playthings which have delighted him heretofore, the wild, the sad, and earnest ways of life? Who at such an age has not resigned himself, to the very core of his quick young being, to the hands of the enchanter, followed him in his wildest fancies, felt his heart swell within him at his heroics, wept at his touches of tenderness, thrilled at his passages of love, and recoiled before some precipice of evil which he has revealed? Those who have known all this and more, will be able to appreciate the feelings with which I sat in my chamber at Oakenshaws, and perused the

pages of "Amoret." My dear mother was perhaps bewildered by her various reading, but it strikes me she might have chosen better. "Amoret" was a story of romance and chivalry, in which love and war appeared as the two great facts of existence, and in which the author, not content with assuming, or giving assurance of, the unimpeachable virtue of his heroine, was continually exhibiting it as triumphant over such deadly assaults, that you were fain to wonder at the temerity of one who dared to venture abroad in company with what at that time appeared to be so dangerous a possession. But in spite of these drawbacks, the beautiful was too near me, in these days of youth and innocence, for me not to have discovered its affinities in the book I had read. All that was true in sentiment and feeling came home directly to my heart, and much that to a colder and more critical reader would have seemed overwrought and bombastic, became as truth to me, measured as it was by my warmth and young enthusiasm. Owing to a reaction which my mother appeared to experience, and which sent her back to her ordinary studies and devotional exercises with renewed diligence, it was some time before I obtained another romance which had received the sanction of her authority. In this dearth of food for my craving fancy, I turned to the "Paradise Lost" of our

great poet, read too long ago as a school task for me to recur to it with all the expectant feelings it is so abundantly fitted to satisfy. But a new light had broken in upon me now; it was not the dull page I had wandered over before, but one replete with exquisite suggestion, bright with fancy, and warm with love. I read of our fond first parents, and my soul seemed to melt within me at the beauty of the picture; I pored over and pondered upon it from day to day. And now I read in the shady garden seat, — I know not why, except that the book had ceased to be to me a book, that the thoughts contained in it had taken root in my nature, and had become a part of myself; and thus, not content to revel in fancy in the beautiful, I must surround myself with its natural expressions, — must array myself for this feast of the soul with simple taste, bedeck my hair with jessamine flowers, and recline in an arbour of roses. With the natural egotism so strong in youth, by reason of the wealth of life with which it is furnished for its course, I made every emotion of which I read my own, and proceeded from this to imagine other scenes and new emotions in which I heroically played my part; I did not stop here, I created something more, — not an Eve but an Adam to share my paradise. Occupied with such pursuits, time passed on without my being cognisant of its flight, when one

day I received another literary reinforcement from my mother,—who never, dear woman, forgot a promise, however she might sometimes delay its fulfilment.

I opened the novel of which I was now in possession, but without the impatience which I had experienced on a former occasion. I had an instinctive knowledge that it was to banish the more elevating thoughts I had been lately entertaining; but curiosity triumphed over all other suggestions, and I was soon intent upon the embroglions and escapes, the plots and counterplots, of one of Mrs. Jones's exciting inanities. If my mother had indeed perused these pages before me, her second selection reflected less credit on her discernment than her first; but I am inclined to think that this time she had felt satisfied, in the simplicity of her heart, with seeing a woman's name on the title-page. As I lost myself deeper and deeper in the story, I felt as one who was breathing a hot, oppressive atmosphere, inimical to healthy life. I sat again retired in my own room, unconsciously shrinking from observation, while satisfying a craving thirst at a source which my better taste rejected. I had nearly waded through this inflated fiction, and was conscious of a morbid depression of the spirits to which I had hitherto been a stranger. I had followed the Rosalind of the tale through

nearly three years of her eventful life, and had left her a *mère de famille*, with every variety of experience over her head, when little older than myself. I laid down the book, and sunk into an unpleasing retrospect of the manner in which my days had been spent during the last two years. I was turned of seventeen, and had never had a lover; I began to wonder if I were still young enough to be susceptible of the tender passion. What was worse, I knew of no one on whom I could attempt the test. The sporting squire at the Hall was a frequent visitor, but he was a widower, with a red nose and a weather-beaten face. Poor Norreys was young, but — a smile crossed my face at the thought of him as a gallant, and went far for the moment to the dispersing my vapours. In this temper of mind I was approaching my face to the looking-glass, to see if time had as yet made any perceptible inroads, when I was startled to see the face of my maid Patty, (in whose honour I have always thought that song of “Cherry-cheeked Patty” must have been composed), reflected behind me in the mirror. I blushed and felt angry at being caught in the foolish act; but soon forgot both displeasure and heaviness in hearing that my mother wished to speak with me in her room.

CHAP. II.

“ Take we hands and round and round
 In a circle deftly fly,
 While beneath our pattering feet,
 Grow the grass-blades green and high :

“ And for every fairy ring
 Thus tracked out upon the glade,
 Shall be wrought a ring of gold
 To the wedding of a maid.”

Song.

THERE was nothing in itself unusual in this summons of my mother, but I was the subject at the moment of those ungratified desires which incline us to a feeling of vague expectation. I smoothed my disordered hair, adjusted my tucker, and descended to the room below. Although three score of the three score and ten years allotted to the life of man, have rolled between the hour of which I write and the present, I can see my mother, and all by which she was surrounded, as she sat before an open window in her easy chair, inhaling the odour of the flowers and new-mown hay, with a distinctness which would be wanting had I looked upon her yesterday. My recollections throng upon me thick and fast,—homely, familiar objects, rise before me one by one ; but I will spare the reader,—they have no-

thing to do with the story I have to tell, and are sacred only to memory.

"Child," commenced my mother, adopting that prim distance of expression which marked the intercourse of parent and child in those days; "your father and I have decided that you, with your cousin, shall make your entrance into what is called life, at Mrs. D'Eynecourt's ball. Many circumstances have conspired to prevent this taking place before,—my tedious illness, and later, the heavy rains and the bad roads,—but though this is to be regretted for your cousin Mary's sake, for you I am convinced it has happened for the best. You are now seventeen"-----

"Seventeen and three months, my dear ma'am," I interrupted with a sigh and a significant look. My mother read my meaning I am sure, as she glanced up at me, and endeavoured to repress a smile.

"Young enough," she said, drawing me towards her, parting my hair, and kissing my brow, "to go forth into the world, supplied with the wisdom which will enable you to choose betwixt the evil and the good. Young enough for me to tremble even yet, at the impressions to which your too susceptible mind will be exposed, unguarded, as alas! it must be, by the watchful promptings of a mother's love. Young enough to call down upon yourself the responsibilities

and cares which attend the young bird that has ventured on the wing. Young enough for all this, my child," repeated my mother in her earnest tone, "and may you never, in time to come, have cause to think too young."

I felt touched by anxieties which I believed could only originate in the strength of my mother's affection, and she, willing that the announcement she had made to me should be other than one of pain, bade me call my cousin also to the conference, and we all three entered into the various arrangements which were to attend our "coming out." At first Mary would have excused herself; she murmured something about her position, dependent on my father's bounty, and said that the gay scenes suitable to my pretensions would ill prepare her for what must be her position as soon as she had fitted herself for it. I now for the first time fully comprehended my cousin's diligence, and the noble desire for independence which existed in her, side by side with the fullest gratitude for the kindness of my parents; but when she saw that her allusions had brought tears into both our eyes, and heard me declare that I would enter into no pleasure of which she was not a partner, she yielded the point of the ball, and assumed a participation in my pleasurable feelings, which I have reason to believe she experienced in only a very modified degree. One

great advantage accrued to me from this determination of my parents in our behalf; my thoughts being fully occupied with the expected event, I was brought once more into contact with the actual, and thus was dispelled the dreamy and vapoury state of mind, into which I had been in danger of falling.

It had been long ago agreed that our entrance into the gay world was to be made under the tutelage of Lady Letty Byng, an amiable woman and sworn friend of my mother, who having married her own daughter, and not yet wearied of the pleasures of life, was glad to undertake the trust. My mother's health forbade her to accompany us herself, and my aunt, good soul, whose inclinations had never taken her into such scenes, even in her youth, and whose very person refused to conform itself to the constraints of the mode, thought it unnecessary even verbally to excuse herself from such an undertaking; as to my father, he stoutly declared that he had no mind to recur to follies unbeseeming his age and clerical character, though he listened to all that concerned our appearance with great interest, and asked my mother one morning as she was called away by the mantua-maker, if we were to be dressed in such brocades as that in which she was married.

It was a busy time for all when the important evening arrived; it was not enough that the few

square feet which went to each of our slight persons was the centre of absorbing interest to ourselves, my aunt, and our maid, but my mother must also wander up and down, and from room to room, now with pins, now with a dish of tea for refreshment, and anon to see how matters were proceeding. We told her she might as well have come with us to the ball, and lead off the first set for our example, as to be so brisk and busy at home; and at last, seeing that our raillery took little effect, and being much excited in our spirits, we led her off fairly to her own room, where we promised to come and exhibit ourselves for her approval, so soon as our dressing should be done. We kept our word of course, and my mother's looks more than her words pronounced her satisfaction at our pains. In truth we were a pair of as fair faces and graceful shapes as you could see: I may say so now, when a remembrance of her hopes and fears is all that remains to assure me that one of those young girls was myself. And yet perhaps, admired as we were by other than the partial eyes which were now surveying us, if two such apparitions could suddenly present themselves to the regard of a fine gentleman of our days, he might turn from them with ill-concealed smiles, nor be able to discern, beneath the quaint fashions of another period, sufficient of beauty to aid his gallantry in subduing his mirth.

However, this remark may perhaps better apply to a period somewhat later than that of which I am speaking, since it was the French Revolution, which was only now fomenting, that brought in the exceeding short waists and scant drapery, that I with others, slaves to fashion, willing and unwilling, have since been doomed to appear in.

When Mary and I stood arrayed for our first ball, our waists were at their natural level, a sash the width of a quarter of a yard, tied behind in an enormous bow, confining the middle space between the hips and the bust. Our muslin dresses folded back from the front, and gathered into festoons behind, disclosed a petticoat of soft white silk, not so long as to interfere with the view of feet incased in shoes rosetted and high-heeled, and which, like the sash, were blue. Our hair was arranged in what was called a "crop," the soft waving locks upon the forehead descending into lengthened curls upon the shoulders, giving an innocent and almost childlike air to features youthful as ours. When my father, on our descent to the carriage, beheld us thus simply attired, he seemed so well satisfied with the figure we made, that I believe in my heart he never discovered that we failed in the flowered brocade, which had entered into a vision of loveliness beheld one blessed day, long ago, and never been forgotten. My mother had found some em-

ployment for her busy fingers even after we had appeared before her, dressed as we had fancied beyond the reach of criticism: there were bows to settle, curls to arrange, folds to smooth, and sweet waters to perfume the handkerchiefs in our reticules. • She had a score of last words about drafts and colds, and some gentle hints concerning deportment. I would fain linger over this scene, but I must pass on to others. This evening is very dear to my recollections: I can see the tear which trembled in my mother's eye as she kissed us at parting when the sound of wheels in the avenue told us that Lady Letty's coach was near, and I can feel the touch of her fingers upon my brows as if they had passed but now among my dark brown curls. • My father had left his game of chess, and was gallantly waiting to escort us to the carriage, with William Norreys by his side. He took my cousin on his arm, and left our tutor for me. Poor Norreys was never meant for a squire of dames; the little that was unusual in my attire had so unsettled his ideas, that after a bashful look with his eyes at their full stretch, he seemed undecided whether to offer his arm or his hand to a being whom he appeared for the moment to regard as some dainty fae. When we had arrived at the carriage he accidentally trod upon some part of my dress, and seized my hand to prevent my falling. The pre-

caution was unnecessary, and I was just about springing up the carriage steps, when, in his confusion at his awkwardness, he hastily asked my pardon and let go my hand, which occasioned me rather to fall into, than ascend to my seat; at which my father laughed as we drove off, and to put poor Norreys, who looked very woe-begone, into penitence, assured him that it was the luckiest thing that could have happened, a fall up stairs being, as all the world knew, the sign of a wedding. I felt now in a great flutter, and could find little to say to Lady Letty, as the coach proceeded along the road to the house of our distant neighbour; which Mary perceiving, she took all the conversation on herself, occasionally taking my hand in hers in token of her sympathy in what was passing within me. I have a confused notion that Lady Letty talked much of "my daughter Wilnot, and my daughter Harcourt," and the time when she had performed for them the same good office that she was now commencing for us; I have an indistinct recollection of the coach drawing up at the door, of our arranging our ruffled plumage in the cloak room, and then the ballroom, with its countless dazzling lights, blazes upon my memory in all the freshness of its first impression. I saw it first from the conservatory, through which the entrance had been arranged, and where we made a tem-

porary pause to pay our compliments to our hostess. A bower of creeping plants covered the arch of the doorway conducting into the gay and busy scene; and the illumination, the decorated walls, the music and the moving cadence of the dancers, filled me with a sense of vague delight; my eye rested not on a single object, but swam delighted over all: they were not candles that I saw, it was not the toil of the mantua maker, those were not the violins and basses of the club of harmonists in the neighbouring town, or these the weary men and women who had flirted and footed it through a London season. That upon which I looked was a vision of Arcadia within walls, where nothing was false or hollow, and every illegallantry had a meaning which might have furnished forth a theme for a poet. A Triumph was being danced at the moment, and I watched the movements, at once airy, confident, and stately, of those whose muscles had been practised in the minuet, with ever increasing feelings of pleasure. This harmony of sound and motion, in which I was already in fancy bearing my part, produced in me I know not what emotions, stirred up within me I know not what phantoms of joy and hope, distinct from the occasion which had excited them, and perhaps even irreconcilable with it, to one of a less romantic and impressionable turn of mind. Keeping time with my foot to the music, and hoping

that some one pair of the many fine gentlemen I saw would lead us out to join the coming dance, I glanced round at my cousin Mary, trusting to read in her looks that she was experiencing the same feelings with myself. But it was easy to see that Mary, who had been so self-possessed in the anticipation of this ball, was, now that she found herself fairly in the midst of the brilliant scene and company, suffering from a timidity little to be expected in one who had indulged in so few hopes and fears concerning it; in me it would have been more in place, but I had high animal spirits, and had been too often the auditor of my own praises, implied or otherwise, not to have acquired some confidence in my power to please. I found some consolation in observing that my cousin had never looked more lovely than in her gentle timidity, and returned to my former contemplation. This time, however, my gaze did not wander unsteadily over the picture before me, but was attracted to the figure of a young man, who stood up talking, or rather listening, to a lady seated against the wall in the adjoining ballroom. My glance was but momentary, for I was conscious of being myself observed; but I stole another look as soon as I thought myself safe, and felt sure my eye had never rested upon so agreeable an object. The gentleman was young and tall, and wore his

golden brown hair without powder, which, though a striking exception to the fashion of the day, was the only one, so far as I could see, that he had attempted. The rest of his person was attired in strict conformity with the mode; but it must be allowed that the peculiar symmetry of his make, added to a certain naturalness and absence of foppish pretension in his air, made you lose sight of the fine gentleman as you regarded him; you forgot the tailor, the perruquier, and the posture-master, and remembered only that you looked upon a handsome man, whose graces were the result of his well-turned limbs and cultivated mind. All this I felt, although I rendered no account of it to myself. The knowledge—for nature and circumstances had rendered me too self-conscious to be blind to the effect I produced—that I had become the object of his special regard, conspired, with the other causes I have named, to lift me to a sort of heaven of confused bliss, akin to that of the opium-eater. Alas for my poor giddy little head when Mrs. D'Eyncourt, advancing with our trio as we were about to pass on to the ballroom, tapped the youth with the golden brown hair with her fan, and presented him as her nephew and a candidate for my hand in the dance which was then forming. I blushed as if the fulfilment of my secret wishes had been an accusation of the deepest guilt, and felt now overwhelmed with the

timidity I had so lately pitied Mary for feeling : I could not trust myself to speak, except in the monosyllabic replies which his questions extorted, and could have wept with vexation as I felt my hand tremble as it rested in his. The dancers were hastening from all parts as we took our places opposite each other, and the mirthful music of the Tent struck up.

I had no idea that there could be any charm in my sudden bashfulness, and was unspeakably annoyed that I dared not raise my eyes for fear of encountering those of my partner. When the dance had commenced, and we were once fairly embarked on our wild career down the room through the wall of cavaliers and ladies ranged on either side, the motion set me all astir again, and my spirits soon triumphed over their temporary re-action. I danced and poussetted with the lightest, only I could not yet keep myself from blushing every moment, nor find the courage to meet those hazel eyes which I afterwards learnt gained much of their own assurance from the timid confusion of mine. My readers who have known only polkas and valse, can hardly enter into the hearty zest which youthful spirits, restrained by grace, could find in the performance of a country dance : to these I can only say, that as I went through its varied evolutions with Sydney D'Eyncourt, with beating heart and careful, well-taught steps,

I envied no fairy that I had ever heard or read of, though she danced with Oberon upon a ring of dark green meadow grass, beneath the light of the moon. As I was being led back to a place by Lady Letty's side, I could not forbear an almost involuntary exclamation at the beauty of a lady dazzling in diamonds, lace, and brocade, whom we passed on our way. My blood rushed to my heart at the look with which she returned and seemed to challenge my companion's glance. "She is Lady Freemantle," he said almost in a whisper, "considered the finest woman about town. She has subdued many hearts, but I have seen those who, wanting all her experience and the resources of art, are nevertheless far more insidious. She would fain conquer in open attack, but there are some who can wound us in flying." He made a low bow as I took my seat, walked some paces backwards, and disappeared in the crowd: it was not until some time after, when I had returned from my second dance, that he approached Lady Letty to pay her his compliments as to an old friend of his family, and answer her eager inquiries concerning the foreign tour from which he had but lately returned. I could not help remarking that while his conversation was addressed to her, his eyes were often directed towards me: and Lady Letty, though commonly much addicted to taking a fair share of the discourse to herself,

made many attempts on this occasion to draw me into it. But I had never before felt so ashamed of my want of knowledge, or so fearful of exhibiting it to a stranger; I remained therefore silent in spite of all her efforts, only listening attentively to what was passing. I was silent also from the excess of my happiness; ignorant of life, and unexercised in disappointment, the future swam before me as a golden dream. Though Sydney D'Eyncourt addressed me as "Madam," and bowed before me with the ceremonious politeness of the time, I felt already as if I possessed a clue to his thoughts, and could read there that he too would at that moment have preferred silence to mirth, a retirement within his own heart to this empty interchange of civilities in which he was engaged. Lady Letty refused to allow of my accepting a partner for the succeeding dance, alleging that as I was unused to late hours and altogether to this species of entertainments, I must at first be very good and quiet, and suffer myself to be restrained by my elders. I obeyed with as much satisfaction as ever I had done in my life, but was not so wholly absorbed in the new world of happiness which seemed to lay at my feet, but that I had some thought to spare for my cousin Mary, whose graceful motions in the dance I was denied a share in, I viewed at a distance with sisterly pride. But Mary, I felt, was a stranger to that keen

delight which had given to my own step the elasticity of a rebound; — she was a part of the moving scene, but it had no part in her. — she was in it, but not of it. Presently as I looked, I saw her turn pale and falter, and her eye become fixed on some object at a distance from where she stood. Before I could find time to make a movement in her direction, or even to utter a cry, she had nearly fallen to the ground. But it seems she had been the object at that moment of the attentive observation of another besides myself: a gentleman who had entered at an opposite door, towards which her regard had been directed, rushed forward ere those about her had perceived the change in her appearance, and received her, lifeless and white as a statue, in his arms. The dance was broken up on the instant, and all were eager to press forward in my cousin's train as she was borne from the room by the stranger who had sprung so opportunely to her aid. Supposing the heat of the room to have caused her faintness, we covered her with shawls, and opened a window in the apartment to which she had been carried: at first all our efforts to restore suspended consciousness were vain; she lay as helpless, and to all appearance as tranquil, as a sleeping infant where she had been placed. At the moment I was too much occupied with Mary, to give heed to any thing that was passing around her; it was not

until she was restored to her customary self, that I reflected on the excited manner of the strange gentleman, who had paced the room with hasty strides, from time to time returning to her side, and looking at her, while he said nothing, with an aspect strangely alternating between joy and terror. Once he came quickly up to her, and raised the shawl which concealed her left hand; he gazed at it for a moment, and then restoring the covering, departed once more to the further end of the room, and continued his agitated walk. After a time the restoratives appeared to take effect; she opened her eyes, but closing them again with a look of sadness. I can never forget, she said to me softly, "Cousin, I have been dreaming." I kissed her cheek, and Lady Letty motioned to me to say nothing, but leave her to collect herself, and return gradually to a consciousness of her position; an instant after, she raised herself in her seat, and looked wildly around, then suddenly a bright smile broke over her whole face, and she turned to Lady Letty and myself, who were beside her, and seemed to question us with her eyes. We understood nothing of what was passing at the time, but attributed her unusual mood to an unsettled state of nerves consequent on her recent indisposition. "I am well now," she said a moment after; "shall we go?" "Where?" asked our chaperone in some surprise. "To the

ballroom," returned my cousin, rising from her seat, and to say the truth looking as well, and to my thought more lovely, than ever she had done in her life. But Lady Letty was too prudent a guardian to risk a return of her faintness, and finding that she was sufficiently recovered, ordered her coach to be instantly got ready, and desired us to prepare for our journey home. We left Mary still on her seat by the window, while we went to make our adieux to our hostess: when we returned, the strange gentleman was beside her, and they were talking as it appeared with much earnestness, but became silent as we approached. Very shortly after, the carriage was announced, and we were escorted to our seats in it by our cavaliers. "Mr. Mordaunt was very kind to me when I was a boy," said Sydney D'Eyncourt, speaking of my father; "I hope he will not have forgotten me."

"I shall soon find out," was my prompt reply, "when I tell him about the ball to-night." My companion turned full upon me, and looked so happy and grateful by the light of the hall lamps, that I immediately caught the inference he had drawn from my words, and felt almost blinded by the blush that rose to my temples.

"I hope," he said, "to be allowed to learn it for myself, and will choose an early day for the renewal of our acquaintance."

Some murmured words also passed between Mary and her *preux chevalier*, but I did not catch their import. When the carriage stopped at Oakenshawes to set us down, we did not fail to congratulate ourselves on the circumstance of my mother's chamber being at the back of the house, which enabled us, by proceeding as noiselessly as possible to our own apartments, to avoid disturbing, and occasioning her needless anxiety. My cousin and I occupied separate rooms, though opening into each other; and as we parted for the night I repressed with an effort my longing desire for a talk with her over the events of the evening, remembering her need of rest after what she had so lately suffered. She turned when she had reached the door to her room, set down her candle, advanced the few steps which separated us, and took me in her arms. She did not utter a word, but I must have been strangely blinded by my selfish visions, when I failed to penetrate the glad excitement which revealed itself in her looks. I warmly returned her embrace; selfish and heedless as I fear I must seem, I had never loved her as I did at this moment, when an undefined feeling of pity for this being so much better, and fairer, but less happy than myself, came to mingle with my affection.

My maid had long left me to myself, and still I lay wrapt in my own thoughts, — sensations

would be the truer word,—and could not sleep. The music of the Tent, so quaint and gay, was ringing in my ears, associated with words and tones I had heard with a pleasure I hardly liked now, in this hour of silence and comparative calm, to acknowledge to myself. Then through my brain, wearied with the late unwonted excitement, passed the thought of Mary just returning to consciousness, and saying in that mournful tone that she had been dreaming. The thought of her thus oppressed me, and seemed to rebuke the gladness of my own spirits. I rose from my bed, and softly unclosed the door of her apartment, hoping to satisfy myself that she was quietly sleeping. The light which was suddenly revealed to me as I stood upon the threshold dazzled my eyes, and hearing nothing stirring within the chamber, I believed that she had retired to rest, and left it burning. As it stood on the table near various letters, it occurred to me that there might be danger in the event of a falling spark, and I was approaching to extinguish it, when my eye chanced to light on the objects by which it was surrounded. They consisted of two letters addressed in a bold manly character to my late uncle, Mabel's father, of a nosegay of dead flowers, and one or two faded single ones; and there was a box, which I had never before seen open, from which the letters

and flowers appeared to have been taken. My immediate impulse was to retreat, as I appeared to be intruding on secrets which my cousin had thought it proper to withhold from me, and I was stepping backwards, being still close to the door by which I had entered, when my glance encountered the form of Mary herself, partially turned towards me, and kneeling against a chair at the further end of the chamber. I could see her well, and she might have seen me but for the absorbing earnestness of her heavenly communings. Never have I beheld such an expression of rapture on a human face as was visible on hers at that moment. Tears flowed in streams from her upturned eyes, but I could not doubt that they were tears of joy, and that she had carried some transport of happiness, as I well knew she had often done her hidden sorrows, to the footstool of the All-loving. I could not help thinking within myself as I stood there, that upon that face of my cousin a painter might have looked, and felt inspired for the representation of a saint in ecstacy. I stole gently from the room, unobserved as I had entered it, and felt almost ashamed when I recollected the feeling which had led me to seek her a few moments before. I now strung together all my passing observations: I thought of the strange gentleman who had carried her fainting from the

ballroom, of the bewilderment of his manner, of the conversation which appeared subsequently to have passed between them, of the suddenness and warmth of that parting embrace which Mary had returned to give me, of the letters to which I judged she had been referring, the withered flowers, the passionate thanksgiving to Heaven for some great and unexpected good,—I saw it all now, and wondered I had failed in divining the mystery earlier. I was still tracing out her story, supplying by the force of my own fancy the links that were wanting, when sleep overcame me, and I did not wake till the morning light peeped in through the curtains of my apartment.

CHAP. III.

"The old, old story, told beneath the moon •

When it was young, and when the earth was green ;

Told still to-day, and to be told for ever,

With hope as faithless, and with joy as keen."

Anon.

"Lord ! who would live ~~lived~~ ^{be} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ a court,

And may enjoy such quiet walks as these ?"

Shakspeare.

NOTWITHSTANDING the vigils and comparatively late hours of the previous night, I obeyed the summons of the God of day, dressed myself before my maid came to awaken me, and, finding that all was silent on my cousin's side of the wall which divided us, descended the stairs, and passed out into the fresh air of the August morning. I soon found, as I left the grounds, and took the dew-bespangled path to the high road, that my morning-walk was likely to restore to me the vigour which I had failed to regain in a sleep which had been curtailed of its usual proportions. I walked on meditating on all which had taken place since I had trodden that path the day before ; on my own vague aspirations, which I dared not yet confess at all in the sight of day, I did not dwell, but I longed impatiently for the time when Mary should make me a partaker of

the happiness which I could not doubt was hers. I was turning over this pleasing anticipation in my mind, when who should I see but Mary herself, as she approached me at the distance of only a few yards, and had just been made visible by a turn in the road. We both, as by one impulse quickened our pace, and almost flew into each other's arms.

"My dear, dear cousin!" cried Mary, "I was thinking of you this moment; I have so many things to tell you."

"My dear, dear cousin!" returned I, "I was thinking of you, and knew that I had so many things to hear!" She turned back with me, and we walked together along the road, bordered on the one side by a hedge, garlanded with brambles in their fullest flower, and on the other by an old wall of solid brick masonry, over which depended the branches of trees heavy with the ripening produce of the year. It was here that I first heard Mary's story, which I shall not attempt to give in the dialogue in which it was poured out by her and elicited by me, but briefly, and only so much of it as may suit the purpose of my narrative.

Her father had been imprudent in his earlier life, said Mary,—and at this part of the opening of her history her face lost its look of unaccustomed gladness, and became grave and fixed, as if the

past into which she looked had been an abyss of darkness and trouble, which could extend its shadow towards her even now. Others than my cousin, said that he had been imprudent to the end, and not only that, but that he had been addicted to every species of excess, — that he gamed and drank deeply, and that while he preserved to the last the reputation of a fine gentleman, his errors had broken the heart of his wife, as his selfishness, had he lived, might have achieved the unhappiness of his daughter. Mary went on to speak of the struggles arising from poverty and debt, which were among the most familiar of her early recollections, and then of a time when the dulness and gathering apathy of her young years was dispelled, — when love, fostered by circumstances, and suffered to ripen unchecked, because, as she afterwards found, unobserved, broke in upon her troubled way, lighted up for a brief space the darkness around her, and was then extinguished, leaving her only a clearer knowledge of the evil and sorrow of her lot. Her lover was a young man whose fortunes did not at that time allow him to accomplish the wish of his heart in offering to Mary a home; and upon his sudden withdrawal from their society, without apparent cause, some months previous to her father's death, the poor girl had doubted that such had ever been his object, and felt, saddened and humbled to

the dust in the belief that she had been deceived in the only vision of happiness she had ever been tempted to indulge.

In the meantime the desperate aspect of her father's affairs induced him to second with all the weight of his authority the addresses of one every way unworthy the tender charge he would have assigned him. In vain she had struggled all alone against the will, still more vainly against the earnest wish, the last fond hopes, of the being to whom she clung, in spite of his many faults, with all the tenacity of baffled affection. She implored that some delay might be granted her, before she was called on for her final decision; and day after day wore away in hopes, which became ever fainter and fainter, of hearing something of her absent lover. It was during this period of suspense, when she already beheld her fate as inevitable in the confident assurance of her father's manner, and that of the spiritless pretender to her hand, that the former was stricken with the malady which was the almost immediate precursor of his death. That from the moment of his attack to that of his demise, he had scarcely an interval of consciousness, was perhaps a fortunate, while it was a most deeply trying circumstance for his daughter, for it was probably owing to this, that she was protected from the utterance of one of those promises, binding upon the

conduct at once against the feelings and the judgment, which the dying have sometimes exacted from the living. It was on looking over the papers of her deceased father, before leaving her former home for Oakenshawes, that Mary discovered two letters addressed to him from Edward Campbell, — that being the name around which so many fond memories still clung. The first, disclosed his attachment, and entreated her father's consent to their union when circumstances should render such a step advisable; the second was short and proud in its tone, containing wishes for Mary's happiness measuredly expressed, and avowing the intention of the writer to accept in a distant land, an opening to better fortune than was offered him in his own. When Mary thus found herself unexpectedly emancipated from the cruel fate which had appeared to await her, she had possessed no clue to the destination of Edward Campbell, and until she had met him last night, had been able only in part to trace the motive, or shapè to herself excuses, for what had appeared to her his sudden desertion. • To the reader it will not be difficult to divine, that, which the filial tenderness of Mary had made her blind to; namely, that the denial which her father had given to Campbell's suit, was strengthened by the assurance that she was shortly, and with her own consent, to be-

come the bride of another. Mr. Campbell had in the interval been made a partner in the house he had joined at Rio de Janeiro: he had returned to conduct its interests in England, had met Mary at the eventful ball, and made his peace in the few hurried words which had been interrupted by the return of Lady Letty and myself. My cousin told me this, and a great deal more, in rapid murmured converse, as we walked side by side on that clear August morning; the breezes already crisp with a foretaste of autumn, as if the breath of the morning had been cooled in its passage over the dew. As for herself, she was all April in the genial smiles and tears which alternated upon her face, all spring in the sudden bursting forth of hopes and joys which had been frozen in her wintry youth. We had turned our faces towards home: she was still pouring forth the tide of her loving heart, and I was still hanging delighted on her tale, when the sharp trot of a horse on the road behind us caused us to start: in another moment the groom who was mounted on it drew up beside the path, and touching his hat to my cousin said, "Miss Clare, I believe?" and presented her with a letter. A sudden flush betrayed at once her recognition of the man, and the emotion which his mission occasioned her; she drew back a few paces, tore open the letter, and read. I am now in posses-

sion of this note, which it is almost needless to say was from Edward Campbell, and will give it here at length.

“MADAM,

“That I am fain to make the inquiries concerning your health, that I have so deeply at heart, otherwise than in person, will, I venture to hope, suggest to you the compelling nature of the circumstances of which I am at this moment the slave. In the brief conference I was able to obtain last night,—too brief I fear wholly to disabuse your mind of all prejudice concerning me, how much too brief for all I could have wished to say!—I had no time to tell you that I was subpoenaed to attend a trial which takes place at N——this morning, and that to this trial was owing my presence in the country.

“The transport of beholding you again, the joy of finding you still free, may be betraying me into some presumption; if so, forgive me, Madam, however unfounded it may be, for my punishment will be severe.

“I have dared to interpret a circumstance which caused me much consternation at our recent meeting, in a manner which has raised me to the summit of happiness; if I have not been too bold, and am not destined to return to the despair of the two last years, write me a single line in

reply to this,—and I trust that while the position I have to offer for your acceptance is not all that you are fitted to grace, it is such as would be no longer considered an obstacle to our mutual happiness by those who are the guardians of yours. I hope my business at N—— will not detain me beyond a day; it rests on your reply whether it releases me to your presence, or to the lonely hours which have longed filled up my intervals of leisure, rendered more lonely by the contrast of a picture my fancy has presumed to trace.

“I am, Madam,

“Your devoted servant till death,

“EDWARD CAMPBELL.”

My cousin tore off the back of the letter, and with her pencil hastily wrote as follows; the spur of her excited feelings supplying her with ready words, and the same impulsion rendering her indifferent to the coquetries of penmanship she had been practising under William Norreys:—

“We have been too long the victims of misapprehension for me not to feel that in my reply to your letter all but the frankest confidence would be misplaced. But as reserve may still interfere to check the freedom of my expressions, I can only beg you to discard from your mind the idea of presumption in listening to the promptings of

your own heart, and to believe what you will of the weakness last night of one who, like yourself, has been no stranger to suffering during the two long years which have divided us." She folded the note as hastily as she had written it, and delivered it to the messenger with a radiant face; and as reading and writing were rare accomplishments in men of his class, with few fears that he possessed the power, if he had even had the will, to pry into her correspondence. We tripped down the road on our way home; and quickened our pace almost to a run, as the fear that the breakfast hour might be past, presented itself. My mother, impatient for tidings of the ball, appeared herself at the morning meal, a circumstance very unusual for her. She asked many questions about all that we had seen and taken part in, and some which might be called "leading ones" concerning the nephew of our hostess of the preceding night. For so much as we had to tell, we could say little then and there, in the presence of my father and William Norreys, the silence of the latter making him, as I felt with some impatience, so formidable a listener that I could not venture to impart, even in a whisper to my mother, a hint of what had befallen my cousin. My looks, however, it must be presumed, were so very expressive of some mysterious revelation I had it in my power to make, that my mother after a time

became quite nervous; and, her weak health making her often a little irritable at any delay in the gratification of her wishes, she begged with some asperity that I would speak out at once if I had any thing to say. Upon this our tutor fixed his great eyes full upon me, and I, becoming very confused, looked in my turn at Mary, and pressed my mother's hand under the table. My father at this moment, remarking my cousins heightened colour, declared that she had been created expressly for a rake, as he had never seen her so fresh and beaming as after the dissipation of the preceding night; and breakfast being concluded soon after, we hastened to follow my mother to her room.

Here Mary again unfolded her story, to a heart as sympathetic as if it had been that of a mother, but with fewer words than she had employed to myself. At her own desire, my father and aunt were also taken into the confidence, and as the former possessed, in common with my mother, the firmest reliance on Mary's good sense, they neither of them doubted that the object of her choice would show himself such as they could approve. Embraces and kind wishes were exchanged on all sides, but even in this tumult of joy and congratulation, I did not quite forget to bestow an occasional glance on the awakening world of my own heart, and to question if the

gentle stir of which I had been sometime conscious within it, had a real existence, and might have consequences yet to be developed.

But the events which had so suddenly fallen out to vary our usually monotonous life, were not yet over for the day; and I was soon to receive a confirmation of the reality of that which on the previous evening had more nearly concerned myself, in the appearance of Mrs. D'Eyncourt's carriage.

It was but natural that she should desire to assure herself that my cousin had experienced no return of her disorder, and that she felt none the worse for her fatigue this morning; but at sight of the well-known chariot, I was thrown into such a flutter of joyful expectation, that I dared not raise my eyes from my embroidery frame, and made such a feint of diligence, and indifference to anything which might hereafter appear, that I pricked my finger in several places, and began wantonly to cut out the stitches of a flower that had been the pride and boast of my kind instructress, from the hour it had opened on the canvas.

The last act of wanton malice had been perpetrated, on discovering from a side glance, that Mrs. D'Eyncourt had descended from the carriage alone, and being evidently in a destructive mood, my scissors found their way through a portion of

the tissue itself, when a minute after a horse galloped up to the door, and Sydney dismounting, was ushered, with his handsome glowing face, into the room where we were sitting.

I am little skilled in the art of making up a story, and if I were, the history of my life at this period was too happy, the course of my love, albeit as true as ever quickened the pulsations of a human heart, too smooth in its glad beginning, to awaken general interest. For those who know me, — and for whom more especially I write my tale, — it would be vain to employ the common arts of mystification, by which curiosity is kept alive, since the honourable name I bear at this day must too clearly assure them of the issue of my girlish hopes.

Mrs. D'Eyncourt had been conducted up stairs to my mother, but the two ladies soon appeared together, and the latter accorded a kind welcome to one whom she had known in the days of his childhood.

I must here remark that the meeting between Sydney and myself had been contrived between our two families, — motives of a kind little likely to weigh with two young and ingenuous hearts, having had a part in the proposed arrangement, which, contrary to common practice at that time, had been conducted without so much as a hint to either of the parties chiefly interested. This

secrecy on a subject so delicate had been maintained, as in the opinion of all concerned, the independent position and character of Sydney made the appearance of any interference on such a point unadvisable. No wonder that my mother had thrown so grave an interest into all her preparations for my entrance into what was indeed to be life to me, and no wonder that catching insensibly from her sense of the importance of the step I was to take, my childish anticipations should have been yielded to without reserve, and in a manner which may expose me to a charge of frivolity with the wiser young people of the present day.

It will readily be conceived that a passion so encouraged from without, and hurried on from within, by the ardent feelings of two young people who seemed born to give each other joy, was not long before it attained its climax, and each discovered that life could thenceforward be only tolerable in the continual society of the other. These were days of supremest happiness, — when the dark manly countenance, and kind eyes of Mary's lover, with the face so noble and gracious of my own Sydney, were added to our family circle; — days happy above all things in the humility of their pretensions, counting themselves as nought in the prospect of those more blessed times to come, which beckoned to us from the unknown future. For

if the present time was happy in its wealth of hope and promise, there was much that we felt was wanting to the plenitude of our enjoyment. My mother, unable to take a practical part in the supervision of her family, was thrown back upon theory for the illustration of her views, which in this guise were apt to be carried somewhat farther than would have been the case had she superintended their working. This last-named task was the province of my aunt, who, though a good and kindly soul, was so conscientiously bent on the carrying out into practice of the abstract notions of her more gifted sister, as to become in fact a very rigid disciplinarian. The restrictions imposed by custom at this period, upon the intercourse of young people placed as we were, were severer than is now the case; and it appeared to be the study of that good aunt's present life to interpose as many obstacles as possible to that better acquaintance with each other on which seemed to depend so much of our future happiness. She did not quit us for a moment while within doors, and, as she suffered severely from tender feet, took to a pair of enormous list shoes, and broke through the habits of years, which had confined her activity in a great measure to the house, to hobble painfully by our side in our walks in the neighbourhood.

But this staid companionship, if it served to

curtail our pleasures, had the effect of enhancing their value when they could be obtained. The looks which were furtively exchanged, told more than if we had possessed the free use of speech; our few and whispered words had the concentrated tenderness of hours of restraint; the hands which wandered into each other's clasp, to be withdrawn in trembling haste, had a world of passionate language in their touch. Yes, these were happy days, and from their happiness we might have learnt a lesson, only acquired later through sorrow and heaviness.

In the meantime, we both determined that the period which was approaching, should be such as to indemnify us for all that was wanting to complete the felicity of the present. Sydney in his travels, had made acquaintance with a retired spot in the north of Italy, to which, on parting from it the year before, he had inwardly vowed to return. To revisit it now with the object of his passionate devotion,—that we should pass there together the first emancipated hours of our love, which would thus be associated ever after in the memory, with scenes worthy to have been their witness,—such was the earnest desire of my young adorer, who, with an eloquence not easy to resist, soon obtained my parents' concurrence in his scheme. That the idea had at once presented itself to a mind romantic as mine, arrayed in all its

manifold fascinations, it is scarcely necessary to say. It seemed to me as if my happiness was a more than mortal portion—as if some munificent genic had read my heart, and prepared to minister to its wildest wish. What a paradise I pictured to myself, in the fair sunny land to which I was to be borne; what a double joy I promised myself in everything beautiful which should await me, since I should enjoy it through his senses and my own! what a charm I imagined I should experience in seeing my husband's perfections put forth for me, without another near to share my ecstacy, or to damp it by cold indifference; and what an exquisite pleasure I should feel in moulding myself, so far as I was able, to that which would please him most,—in dressing myself in the choicest array, in cultivating all the loves and graces, without fear of raising the shadow of a suspicion that they were designed for the notice of any beside himself!

One day, in a moment of unusual expansion, I hinted at my views to my mother. She looked at me fondly, but shook her head with a smile, which had more in it of sadness than mirth.

“Yours are young ideas, my child,” was all she said; but I believe she would have added more, had not I; remembering the many hours my father passed away from her, necessarily in the furtherance of the business of his parish, and voluntarily in his

study with his books, feared I had given her pain, and hastened to change the subject. Indeed, at this time my whole being appeared to be divided between two sentiments,—love for my gifted and beautiful Sydney, and a tender pity for all the world beside. Unreasonable as it may appear, there was no one who came in for so large a share of the latter feeling as one who to all appearance was no less happy than myself, my cousin Mary. I could never think of the city home to which she would be taken, or the many hours daily in which she would be left without her husband, but I felt a cloud pass over my own bright hopes. Here, as in all things else, it appeared as if Fate had preferred the less to the more worthy of us two: she, in the heavy atmosphere of a crowded town, obliged to fall back, in the absence of the companionship she loved, on the tiresome details of a household; I, in the midst of classic associations, in the presence of a generous nature, in a land where life was easy and irresponsible, and with the hourly presence of the being most dear to me on earth,—how differently had our lots been cast! I saddened, as I reflected upon the contrast, but took care to confine my considerations to myself, as Mary, satisfied with the good that was before her, had never thought of repining for that which was unattainable.

It is possible that we may each of us have been

confirmed in our different views, by the characters, no less than the outward circumstances, of our lovers. Edward Campbell was a man somewhat past thirty, whose fortune it had been not to toy with life, but to struggle to realise a position in it. While this had developed the energies of his character, it had brought out its sterner features, or caused him to wear them something nearer to the surface; for beneath the prudence, the active forethought, and worldly knowledge of the merchant, there beat a heart as warm and true, as full of generous impulses, and susceptible of soft impressions as ever agitated a human bosom; and to this it may be added, that the less attractive cares in which his youth had been engaged, had preserved it as fresh, as buoyant, and untouched as that of the merest child. Under the guidance of a man so accustomed to the forming of just, and not simply of brilliant and plausible calculations, it was not strange that the *possible* in happiness, and no more, should have become unconsciously the aim of my cousin. The attachment of Sydney and myself was founded rather on a similarity than a contrast of characters, and tended to strengthen the extravagances in which young people of ardent temperaments, and having no experience of life, are tempted to indulge. Sydney D'Eyncourt was at this time twenty-three. He had been early left an orphan, heir to a large estate, but had had

the good fortune to have found a careful guardian in his aunt, and to have received the benefit of instruction, both ethical and moral, from a man whose conversation gave a charm to the one, and whose life furnished a continual illustration of the other.

A young man endowed as he was, launched suddenly into the world of fashion and folly, might have been thought to be in a perilous position: but what would have made the imminence of the danger to another, was a safeguard to him. The vices of the age were too apparent; he flew dazzled at first, like a moth into the glare of a candle, but he quickly became aware of all that was pernicious in the noxious blaze, and felt the absence of the great and the true. He quitted the dance of folly in disgust, and went, as he said, to bathe his soul and renew his youth in the pure fountain of nature. He went to Germany, Italy, and Greece,—in short, took most of the places comprised in what was then known as the *Grand Tour*, with his former tutor as his chosen companion. His romantic prepossessions leading him rather to the study of classical remains, and to dreamy reveries upon their sites, than to the attainment of that species of knowledge which is the result of intercourse with our fellow men, at the time we became acquainted and linked to each other, he was scarcely more fitted than myself to

give a practical direction to a mind which looked upon life as a vast kaleidoscope.

The marriages of myself and cousin were appointed to take place on the same day, one very early in October being fixed, as it would allow of our making the passage of the Alps on the way to our Paradise while the time of year was still favourable. We were to remain away an entire twelvemonth, during which time my father would be occupied to his heart's content superintending the arrangements for improving, and bringing into perfect order, the mansion of the young head of the D'Eyncourt family, which, happily for me, was situated at no great distance from my former home.

I could linger fondly over scene after scene which rises up before me as I write; I could tell of our last meal partaken together as a family, of the risings of fond regret, and feelings of solemnity which mingled with the gladder emotions of the hour: I could recall my mother's hidden tears, and my father's attempted sallies of mirth; I can see my aunt with her watchful eyes and indulgent heart; and I could conjure up William Norreys sitting silent in his accustomed place, shrinking into himself as if he sought to make us forget his very existence more completely even than we did in the hurry of other thoughts. I could summon

back the two rows of poplar trees, which have since furnished fuel for many a Christmas fire, but which stood erect at the time of which I speak, guarding the path by which we passed to the church. I could tell of the autumn purity of the sky, and how those yellow leaves of the poplars, thinned already by many a breeze, hung out against it like golden fruits. I could recount how with tremulous fervour we uttered the irrevocable vows, how gladly we passed out into the pure free air again when they were ended, each beside the chosen of her heart, and carrying her young hopes down the churchyard path with its border of lichen-covered tombs; and should love to look back upon the well-known faces which thronged to catch a look at the happy brides and to pour out blessings on their heads. But the limits I assigned to this portion of my narrative have been already exceeded, and I must be satisfied to possess these recollections fresh and blooming amid age and decay, without encroaching upon the patience of my readers.

Although my mother received comfort from the thought that my future home would be near her own, and that of my cousin in the city to which she was now going would be of easy access, there were many tears shed at parting, and I believe when the moment of separation arrived, I found it the severest I had ever known. I threw my

self in a passion of sudden grief into my mother's arms ; I begged of my aunt forgiveness of numberless offences which rose up reprovingly before me ; I asked my father in a voice choked with sobs who would now walk with him, or read aloud his paper in the evening ?

It was only my aunt who attempted to reply. She assured me in a manner which, had matters stood on their old footing, might have been subversive of all authority, that my conduct had been perfect ever since I was born, and commended me in a broken voice to the loving indulgence of my Sydney, adding that if not carefully watched I was given to read romances when I ought to be asleep, and was much addicted to wearing damp shoes.

My cousin Mary was all tears and smiles ; she did not leave quite all that I did — nor left it for so long. She murmured forth thanks and blessings for the goodness which had been extended to the friendless orphan, while Edward Campbell regarded her as she spoke with eyes which seemed to say that my parents, in opening their doors to her, had “received an angel un-awares.”

We parted with each other upon the threshold,—a threshold which led from our early home, and launched us in the untried life beyond. We

stood for a moment face to face, clasping each other by the two hands, and looking down, so to say, into each other's hearts, by the index furnished by our own. A hasty embrace and we were gone, each on her separate way, upon the road of life.

CHAP. IV.

Why did you gleam like a beckoning light,
Flickering out in the gloom of the night?"

Thomas Hood.

I RESUME my narrative when its scene is laid in another land, and when an interval of some seven or eight months has passed over. Of these a brief retrospect will be all that is necessary to my purpose. They had been spent by Sydney and myself in that retirement we had coloured with such hues of enchantment, and which he had selected to be the witness of the first unrestrained emotions of our now wedded love. By Mary and her husband they had been passed, as we learnt from their letters, in an alternation of busy cares and pleasures, — the latter being often, as it appeared to us, too hardly pressed upon by the former. As for the good people at home, their usual routine of occupations, not immediately concerning my cousin and myself, went forward as before, cheered by our frequent letters, and by the hope, as time wore away, of welcoming back

their more distant wanderer to a home not far from their own.

The spot which Sydney had chosen for our retreat was one which fully justified the rapturous report he had given of it. A château somewhat dilapidated, but put into temporary repair, at the desire of my husband, by the agent he had appointed to engage it for our use, commanded a view which is probably unsurpassed in its peculiar aspect of loveliness by any in the world. A sloping sward, not kept so trimly but that it was plentifully bestrewn with daisies and buttercups, and even with cowslips here and there, led down to a small lake enclosed within the grounds of the château, and which had collected, in clusters round its sides, trees which at the time of which I am writing were clothed in the verdure of early summer, and offered, in the beautiful disorder of their interlacing branches, such a shelter from the southern sun as might have seemed proper for a wood-nymph or naiad. On the opposite border of the lake stretched vineyards of the vine and olive, the dusky green of the latter making a dark streak along the landscape, which threw out into vivid relief the bright and fresh foliage of the nearer trees. Beyond were dotted villages, or the straggling cottages of the vine-dressers, and the turn of a distant road, from which there rose ever and anon

the dust which marked the track of a passing vehicle, gave a feeling of life and habitation to the scene, too distant to interfere with its sentiment of repose. Above and beyond all towered the lofty peaks of the Appenines, gleaming like white and burnished metal on the side where they were smitten by the sun, and almost losing the opposite angles of their pure outlines in the palpitating depths of the sky.

It was early in the day, and the heat not yet so great as to occasion inconvenience: I sat near a half-open window, with a book in my hand, which failed however to engage my thoughts. My husband was seated at a table facing the window, correcting a copy he had made after an artist who had painted the scene I have been describing, by a comparison of it with the original before him. He had been thus occupied for several hours, for the middle of the day being extremely sultry, it was our custom to rise early, and make as much of the time as was possible before noon.

But if my attention was withdrawn, as I have said, from my book, it was not to contemplate the landscape which lay so invitingly before me: it was rather to mark the changes from grave to perplexed, from earnest to eager, which passed over my husband's face. I had spoken to him many times within the last two hours, but he had

not heeded my remarks or answered my questions; or if occasionally he had forced himself to do so, had replied to them with a mistaken impression of their meaning which was more unwelcome than silence. I had abandoned my vain endeavours at conversation, though my mind refused to employ itself but with him. I felt uneasy and oppressed: I changed my attitude continually; sitting or reclining I could gain no rest: must I confess that I was jealous of his occupation? Such was indeed the case: I thought that if I could have persuaded myself it gave him pleasure, I might have been reconciled to the abstraction which made him indifferent to my presence, but it was hardly possible to look upon the perturbed expression of the face before me, and believe that he delighted in the practice of an art, which he yet flew to as a pastime while I was near.

It may be that my thoughts were not altogether so unreasonable as they may appear. Such seemingly groundless visitings are rarely the first with which we have been assailed; they stand no more aloof than any other of the links in the chain of cause and effect, but are intimately connected with some which have gone before, to which at the time we may have refused to give heed. It is thus that an incident trifling in itself, may fire a train of most vehement emotion.

It is true in my own case, that for some months past the whole varied aspect of life had seemed changed. All had hitherto been progression and hope, everything now appeared dull and stationary. It was thus even with the sun, the brightest I had ever looked upon, — that of a glorious Italian summer : I wearied, I sickened of its unchanging light ; I longed for clouds, or to see it ever covered with a dull veil — anything so that there were alternation and life. The spring had been wont to awake in me a joy of animal existence like that which speaks in the song of the lark, in the flight of the butterfly, and frolic of the lamb ; it had come and gone, but had failed this time to send through my young veins its summons to a new and joyful existence. And all this, because to my too eager watchfulness, our love seemed to me not that which it had been in its earliest day. That mortal decay, that mortal weariness, can approach this flower of paradise, is the sorest lesson that life has to teach the inexperienced. I was learning it gently, but I was a refractory pupil. My husband had never yet spoken to me one unkind word, no, nor even an inconsiderate one ; we passed our time almost wholly together ; if I was ill, he was unspeakably anxious and watchful ; he called me still by the pretty names which when I heard them first had so rejoiced my heart. But the soul of these attentions

was continually wanting; what had formerly been the very coinage of the moment, now flowed from him with a sort of unconscious inertness, as if our relations had become already so much a thing of course, that they were incapable of striking him with a new emotion. 'I struggled hard to bear up against a sorrow which had appeared so unexpectedly in my path; but while I maintained an appearance of calm, and usually of cheerfulness, it was preying on my very heart's core. It seemed to me, if I may be allowed the comparison, as if I had 'extracted from life its sweetest juices, while that which remained to me was but the pulp and husk, from which I turned loathing away.

Sydney threw down his brush with a few impatient words at his ill success, and looked blankly out of the window, stretching his arms which had become cramped with his position, and barely suppressing a yawn.

"I shall ride over to the city, I think, before the day becomes too hot," he said as he approached and stooped to kiss my forehead; "I shall leave you to your book, my little Kittie,—it is very interesting."

I had not found it so, but looked hard at the page where it was open, in the hope that my drooping eyelids would conceal the tears that gathered in spite of all my efforts. I pressed his

hand, kissed it, and bade him go,—but did not raise my eyes.

“You are expecting a letter from Mary, to tell us when they are coming,” he again remarked, as he prepared to depart; “I hope I shall be able to bring it for you; you will be glad to have it, I know, and to hear that your cousin will soon be with you; you do not care for *my* companionship, Kate, any more as you used to do!” With this half-playful reproach he hurried away, waving his hand as he passed out of my sight. I waited until I heard the tramp of his horse’s hoofs becoming fainter in the distance, and then I wept, Oh! so many tears;—they seemed ever to be waiting ready to fall, —it was as if a rainy season had succeeded in my fervid temperament, to the burning one which had passed away.

“Oh life! oh love!” I exclaimed, starting up with sudden vehemence, and throwing down the book whose unread pages seemed to mock me,—I who at no great distance of time could have lost my entire being in its imaginary interests,—“Oh life! oh love!” I repeated with bitterness, “why should ye not cease together?” I could say no more, tears choked my utterance: I threw myself down on a sofa in a dark corner of the room and buried my face in the cushions with the sound of my sobs.

A tide of melancholy thoughts broke over, and

chased each other through my brain ; disturbed and dark as my mind was at this moment, it was sufficiently clear to find room for bitter reflections on all that we had done, and so vainly, for our love. How we had separated ourselves, not only from the frivolous pleasures of the world, but almost wholly from its legitimate interests ; how we had often and cheerfully made the sacrifice to each other of our individual wishes and will ; how we had omitted nothing, in our married state, of all which had assisted to charm us in our single one : all these facts, with illustrations innumerable, occurred to my mind as I wept there alone, and my sorrow was aggravated unspeakably by the knowledge, that these things, and a thousand others known only to myself, should have failed to retain in its integrity for eight short months, that which I had fondly hoped would have proved eternal. In the midst of this bare examination of my case, there was one thing which I shrunk from acknowledging to myself, the secret consciousness of which, however, made the bitterest drop in the cup of chastisement I was partaking : I felt that the languor and inertness which had crept over my husband's sentiments towards myself was by no means unshared by me. In vain I had sought to spur my flagging spirits to their former pace,—the energy of feeling was exhausted. With this knowledge I could not blame

my husband, or persuade myself that my case was more than commonly unfortunate. I accepted my sorrow therefore as a bitter fruit of the tree of life which I had not been prepared to partake of, bemoaned our unhappy fate, less as individuals than as mortal beings, and turned my longing thoughts to the perfections of a future state, too nearly forgotten in the indiscreet enjoyment of this. There are many who will smile at a grief which, they will say, had so little of reality in it as this of mine. To such I can only reply that I am a grey-haired woman, whose pulses have long since ceased to quicken for the little things of time, and that looking back upon these moments through the mists of years, I can be grave even now, and sad to think of the struggles of my heart that day.

A weary hopelessness succeeded, as the day wore on, to the more violent agitations of the morning; so that by the time my husband returned, I was able to meet him, if not with the radiant air which his approach had never failed to call up in the days gone by, at least without the evidence of the tears I had been shedding. For in the midst of all my waywardness, I loved him too dearly to sadden him by the shadow of a single thought which I was able to repress within my own heart.

The task of maintaining towards him a cheerful

countenance was rendered easier than I had foreseen. He brought with him, from the post of the neighbouring town, a letter from my cousin Mary, which, having in the very negligent postal arrangements, then prevailing, been long delayed on the road, announced the expected visit of herself and husband, at a shorter notice by far than we had reckoned on.

The joy of seeing this dear friend, who stood to me in the place of a sister, who could tell me of my mother as she had lately seen her, and whose very aspect would be full of home associations, was so great, as for the time to occasion almost a revulsion of feeling; and it was only when I noted the preoccupied air of my husband, which even this pleasant intelligence had failed to dispel, that I returned to the painful reflections it had interrupted.

For the next two days I was as busy in preparing for the reception of my guests as those can be whose means surround them with a household of well-trained domestics, zealous in their several offices, and naturally jealous of interference. I chose those rooms for their occupation which could show the fairest view from the windows; I decked them with the choicest flowers without a thought of headaches or the exhalations of hydrogen, and arranged around the

walls some prints which I knew to be favourites with my cousin.

I forced back all uneasy thoughts, and in an ever-increasing excitement of expectation, awaited the morning they had fixed for their arrival. After some impatient watchings on both our parts, our visitors appeared, just before noon as they had led us to expect, but, contrary to all our calculations, without exhibiting any of those signs of travel and fatigue for which we had been fully prepared as the result of their journey through the night.

The truth of the case was, as we quickly found from their confessions, that they had been comfortably and slyly located, since six o'clock of the preceding evening, at the chief hotel at —, which was distant from us only seven English miles; and that it was after a good night's rest that they had driven over to our retreat, and were able to present themselves in the satisfactory condition in which we were so happy to welcome them.

For the first quarter of an hour we could tell or hear little, for the pleasant flurry and disquiet common to such occasions, and for the disjointed exclamations in which our pleasure found vent; but after this first effervescence was over, I was able to observe at my leisure, that the current of feeling which flowed beneath it was, with

Mary and her husband, as bright and joyous as the sparkles which had found their way to the surface. Alas! young as I was, I was guided in my observations, by an experience which had been dearly bought.

The emotions consequent on our meeting having a little subsided, I struggled in vain against the depression which was gaining upon me anew. When Mary looked with her clear eyes down into mine, and spoke with the good faith natural to her, when she touched; as she rarely did, on anything personal to herself; when she spoke, I say, of that well-spring of happiness which her sweet relation of wife had opened to her,—I felt my glance sink before that in which she sought for my sympathy, and sickened with feelings whose indulgence I was forced to postpone, at the cruel contrast her experience had offered to my own.

I believe I should have sunk under all I endured that day, and which I can hardly look back upon as having passed between the rising and the setting of one sun, but that pride sustained me. I laughed and talked, sang when I was bidden, and felt excited occasionally to the wildest mirth. Mary was my senior by some few years, and had in times past been my Mentor; I felt now the elder of the two. Her gaiety was so natural, so irrepressible, her sympathies so ready;

she appeared to have the pleasure of a child in everything fair or pleasant which met her view, from the summer light of the sun, to a flower in the grass; in short, the heart which had timidly shrunk within itself under the colder influences by which it had been surrounded, had expanded on finding that it was suddenly raised to the first warm place in that of another. She was no longer the quiet being I had ever known her, but was full of merry converse, while all the time, as she ran on from theme to theme, her husband's eye followed her with a look of playful interest, which told better than many a sentence could have done the happy intelligence which existed between them.

In truth he might well listen lovingly to what she had to say, for the narrative of their travels as furnished by her, exhibited him as so wise, so gallant and discreet, in dealing with the adventures which never fail to meet those by the way who undertake journeys in such a temper of mind, that had the testimony been uttered by other than the partial lips from which it flowed so unconsciously, it must have proved Edward Campbell a very Paladin, worthy of the proudest days of knightly achievement.

The evening of this long day at length closed in, and candles were introduced with the *felicissima notte*, which is the customary and genial sa-

lutation of an Italian domestic on performing this office. As Mary still pursued the story of her journey, I sought the eyes of my husband, with I know not what of meaning in my own. He looked towards me at the same moment, our eyes meeting as by attraction; there was an expression of profound sadness in his. It lasted but for an instant, and we both turned from each other to mingle in the conversation of our guests; but that short glance had told much: I knew from it that he regretted the light of love which had waxed dim, perhaps as much and as deeply as I did.

I longed for rest, for my temples throbbed and my eyes burned; but the hour was not yet come; and as I rallied my spirits and attempted all manner of lively sallies, though as one in a dream, I scarcely knew whether I or another had said the things we laughed at. I had the satisfaction of hearing that I had never looked or seemed so well, and that it rejoiced the hearts of my dear good friends to see me in such a strain of joyous spirits. Even Sydney was deceived by my appearance and manner, and began to share in my mirth so soon as he believed it to be real. He said a hundred good things, and numberless kind ones, as we all four sat round our evening meal, the curtains waving, and lights flickering, in the delicious evening breeze, pledging each other and

the dear and distant ones at home, in cool glasses of the wine of the country.

“I fear, dear Kate, you are over-excited,” remarked my cousin at length, “and tired in spite of these glowing cheeks. I have been talking you to death all day, and now you are trying to pay me back in kind, but were too far gone before you commenced. I vote that we adjourn the meeting for to-night, and that you wait for your revenge until to-morrow.” I protested against the measure proposed, but she insisted, and Sydney seconded her resolution.

“I am really half afraid,” she resumed, laughing as we parted for the night, “that I have been saying a great deal too much, and that Edward has been demeaning himself in all sorts of ways unbecoming his reputation as a grave and dignified citizen. But you know, dear Kate, you must make allowances,—you who live in this world of toil like privileged and superior spirits, tasting only its pleasures and none of its vulgar cares,—for those who, in the homely matter-of-fact of the case, are off duty and ‘taking a holiday.’ Ours is a mere summer-day’s ramble over the Elysian fields in which you dwell continually,—this a mere sip in passing of the flowers which make your food! You cannot expect us to view, to taste, or to enjoy with well-bred calmness. And then we have all our pleasures together,—it

is enough to turn our heads a little. This of the days we spend apart, when Edward is toiling in his grim money-mart, and I at home. Now we have nothing to do for the next six blessed weeks, but to endeavour 'o repay ourselves, at a frightful rate of interest I promise you! for the charms in each other's society we have been compelled to forego. You who can look at each other from morning till night, can form no idea of the satisfaction I have felt in assuring myself that he was bodily before me in the Diligence. Oh, Kate, happy girl that you are! Do you know that I have likened you both in my mind to the little water-plants of which we read an account in the natural history written by that Italian? You were delighted with it at the time, and so was I. 'Those fond little flowers, living for their love.'

"And dying for it — one at least," I interrupted, in a faltering tone.

"Well, dying for it, who could not if there were need?" said Mary, as she shook down her shining hair. "But I am doing the very thing I began by begging pardon for, letting my tongue run on as wildly as that of a child let loose from school. Good-night, sweet cousin, and pleasant dreams,—but no, no dreams at all for you, it is wrong to be so prodigal even in empty wishes,

—leave the pleasant dreams for the solace of the sad.

Mary playfully shut her door upon me, for we had been talking in her bed-room, and thought to dismiss me to the rest she imagined me to need. She had called me happy, and coveted some features in my lot, while, rejoicing, with what seemed to me the blissful unconsciousness of a child, in her own. Yes, she whose earnest sorrow had inspired me with wonder and awe, when, three years before, I had read it in her gentle face, as we walked in the old garden at Oakenshawes, now presented herself to my imagination as one whose inexperience was to be protected; and dropping on my knee with an irrepressible impulse, I asked for her that the knowledge might long be distant, that taught her the limits of her most cherished possession. Unknowing these limits, she was rich, and I felt her to be so even then. The world was large enough for the conqueror while there were nations to subdue; he only wept at its littleness when he called it all his own.

Rest that night was not for me, though I slept uneasily during the earlier part of it, and in this troubled sleep was visited by visions, not such as Mary had said would be wasted upon me in my happy estate, but by a succession of those grim fantasies which indicate the approach, if not indeed the actual presence, of fever. I started up

towards morning, and found that I was shivering with cold. Quite inexperienced in every species of illness except the languor and habitual delicacy of my mother, it did not occur to me to apprehend any serious consequences from my present sufferings; and with that sort of satisfaction which an agitated mind will occasionally draw from a seeming sympathy of the bodily frame, I composed myself quietly again in my place, and lay quite still till morning. I watched the outlines of the various objects in my chamber as they separated themselves from the obscurity of the early dawn, and had strange thoughts about them; but with the broad and inviting light of day, the mist seemed to clear from my senses as from the inanimate things around me; and though my head throbbed and I felt burning and parched with thirst, I did not accept these symptoms as a sufficient reason for keeping my room on the first morning after the arrival of the Campbells. Besides it had been agreed between Sydney and myself the previous night, that we would take them, before the meridian heat had set in, to see a lovely village boasting some remains of great interest; and I lost no time in making myself ready to propose, and to join them in the excursion.

Early however as we had thought ourselves, our friends had been earlier still, and one of the

servants had been desired to inform us that they had gone for a ramble in the neighbourhood of the ~~chateau~~, but would return to join us at breakfast at our usual hour. As we looked from the window in disappointed silence at this announcement, we descried their two figures at a distance, now pausing to embrace with a look the whole prospect before them,—now turning to each other, to receive, as I thought, a warmer impress of its beauty as they saw it reflected in pleasure on a beloved face, —now again wandering on, hand in hand and side by side, through the lovely campagne country, which had tempted them from the windows of the rooms I had assigned them.

The way of my husband had been made too smooth in life not to have encouraged in him some slight impatience, which manifested itself on the present occasion in petulant expressions of annoyance at the miscarriage of our plan. He looked pale too, and ill at ease; he was dissatisfied and at war with himself; but it was not till some time later that I learnt the dangerous precipice upon which at that moment he was standing, betrayed, as he had been by the aimless life we had been leading, into seeking the pernicious excitement of play. After debating for a time whether he should send to recall them, distant as they already were, or leave them to pursue their way, he determined, without as it appeared to me sufficient reason,

on the latter course; and suddenly remembering that his favourite horse, which he never permitted a groom to mount, had not been out of the stable the preceding day, he excused himself to me for the hour and a half remaining until breakfast-time, and left me to my own meditations.

I had not been long alone with these, before they were interrupted by the abrupt entrance of a girl in her native peasant costume, who made one of our household at the château. She threw herself before me with all the vehement demonstrations of sorrow peculiar to her southern clime, and I gathered, as well as I was able from her broken exclamations, that she had just received tidings of the deep distress of her family, which had been occasioned by the sudden overflowing of the mountain torrents in the village where they resided. The lateness of the season had left them unprepared for this calamity, which was further aggravated by her mother having been confined to her bed by sickness at the time of its occurrence. Having gathered from my informant by degrees, that all their little substance had been swept away by this misfortune, and that her mother was lying in a precarious state, I felt ready at the moment to mingle my tears with those she was so plentifully shedding. But the rich have ever a ready balm with which to assuage these sorrows of sympathy, and unluckily

for myself,—for had I entertained them longer they might have diverted the current of my own thoughts,—I bethought me of the contents of my purse; and bidding the good girl hasten to her parents, repurchase for them all that they had lost, and get the best doctor that could be found for her mother, left her invoking blessings in the name of every saint with which she was acquainted, and taking my way over the bright sward towards the lake, was soon again retracing the course of my interrupted reflections.

But little encouraging as may have seemed the contrast between the fresh delight in each other's society manifested by Mary and her husband, and that so fatal *ennui* which had crept into our own intercourse, my contemplations on the subject were assuming a more reasonable shape. Perhaps the absence of bodily vigour, of which I became sensible as I crossed the lawn, may have had its share in subduing the turbulence of feeling, but I believe also that I was beginning, even then, to entertain a vague consciousness that the infelicity of our present, as compared with our past life, was the result of error in its plan; a reflection which suggested a thousand hopes, called up a thousand latent energies, with which I felt I might conquer back the treasure I had been looking upon as lost. I sought out a favourite spot on the bank of the lake, and there

laid me down. A pleasant sensation of weariness and repose crept over me, in which the action of my over-strung nerves seemed suspended in a sort of dreamy half-consciousness. Now I woke up to full sight and sense of the objects around me, and again they faded from my view, or mingled with each other to be resolved into fantastic shapes, while the flowery bank upon which I reclined seemed to be sinking from ~~under~~ my weight, leaving me floating in air. Through all there was a dull sensation of the sorrow I had known, but I looked upon its might as already past, and had a feeling that help was near.

For a long time it appeared as if my mind were thus groping among ideas to which it had lost the clue, until at length it began to fix itself, with my looks, upon the objects immediately around me, and to attach to them a character, meaning, and importance, with an indescribable charm of beauty and mystery, which had never been revealed in them before. But my further experiences of this novel nature I must resume in another chapter.

CHAP. V.

“’Tis a ditty
 Not of these days, but long ago ’t was told
 By a cavern wind unto a forest old;
 And then the forest told it in a dream
 To a sleeping lake.”

Keats.

SUCH a life and movement in nature as on that day I never remembered to have seen. There was scarcely a breath astir, but every leaf and every blade was endowed with what at first sight might have appeared to be independent motion, but which a closer examination proved to result from the busy strivings and hurryings to and fro of countless living creatures. There was the small green lizard, the light-bodied ant, the beetle with his bright wings, the spider awaiting in a feigned slumber the slightest vibration of his net, and the philosophic bee, who uniting labour with luxury has found the Arcadian secret of the happiness of life, singing over his pleasant toil, and turning even his orgies to account. There were butterflies, there were lady-birds, there were moths, there were flies of innumerable species, things creeping and things flying, many which have no names out of learned

vocabularies, and some haply which have no names at all. Most was busy, all eager, and as very few of them were denied the power of expressing themselves in a language understood by their fellows, though as yet only audible to me, there was little cause to wonder at the ceaseless murmur and motion of the genial mid-summer morning.

The influences around me were so soothing, and so welcome after the disturbance of my own thoughts, that I yielded, my whole being up to them without reserve, turning from the uneasy contemplation of my own bedimmed future, from the present which looked dull and sinister as it had thrown off one by one all its borrowed enchantments, and from the past, which my thoughts, in their perpetual recurrence to it, had even ravished at last of its sweetness,—as a flower in time is bereft of the fragrance it has too often lent to the passing gale. I threw behind me the weight of anguish under which I had been struggling so long: I became all eye and ear; I watched the bright harmless things about me, obeying in their motions the immutable laws which neither they nor their fathers had thought either of comprehending or infringing, and drank in with open ear the music of their combined voices. A new world seemed to be revealed to my perceptions, differing perhaps not so much in the nature of its

interests as in their manner of displaying themselves, from the one I turned from, and which my new impressions were ever more completely shutting out from my recollection. I became a party to new cares, to new hopes, and to objects furthered by calculations much more infallible than any I had hitherto had cognisance of; and still farther and farther behind me, as I watched and listened, seemed my own sorrow, and even my personal identity, to be left.

We do not enter into the deepest arcana of knowledge at a single step; the eye which has been accustomed to gloom, gathers not into its first glance all that the unclouded light of heaven can reveal: study in the one case, lengthened contemplation in the other, can alone avail to these ends; and thus I saw not, till a portion of time, I know not how great or how little, had intervened, the wonders I am about to describe.

From the life and motion which had at first seemed limited to the winged and creeping things about me, I began to perceive a subtler and more beautiful life, a more graceful, sustained, and luxurious motion, in the herbage, and more especially in the flowers, which mantled my place of retreat. A sense of ecstasy filled my being as the life about me seemed to minister to, and renew, my own. One orison of praise seemed in this morning hour to rise up from all the pal-

pitating and but newly-awakened world, to the sun which shone in heaven as the symbol of the Creator; and I joined in that orison with my whole heart.

It struck me that amid all this life and joy, this harmony of voices and ceaseless motion, the creatures of the lake mist, now that the sun had gathered power in his ascent, enjoy the happiest consciousness of all. The over-arching trees made a checquered skreen from his fiery beams, and caught in their arms and shook out over them, the coy breezes of the summer morning, while the surface of the translucent wave afforded a resting place for such light shapes, the softest and coolest that imagination could conceive. Meditating thus I turned my eyes in the direction of the water, but seeing on its surface only a small congregation of plants and weeds of insignificant growth, I resumed my scrutiny of those objects of superior interest which met my glance on every side.

As I withdrew my eyes it seemed to me that a change, the nature of which its entire novelty and my own astonishment prevented my at first comprehending, was taking place in all things, not only in the earth beneath, but in the aspect of the firmament which encompassed it. When I had sufficiently recovered the first shock of surprise to receive a definite impression from what I

saw, I discovered that not only were the things I had been accustomed to call inanimate endued with a conscious life, but that the grass, the trees, their leaves and flowers, — all things which derived their nourishment from the soil, — were growing upwards and expanding, until the weed which I should a moment before have trodden under my foot unobserved, had almost assumed the dimensions of the tree beneath which I had reclined, which in its turn had expanded into proportions which would sound fabulous in description. I looked in bewilderment from one object to another, and observed the same marvellous transition in all. It never occurred to me to turn my eyes upon myself, or to question the possibility of my having in my own person participated in the change which was developing around me. It is true that the high grass and flowers nothing impeded my scrutinising glances, but I am inclined to think that the vision of what I then saw for the first time in my life, was vouchsafed to me through some inner perception awakened for the occasion, rather than through the organs of ordinary sense.

As I continued to follow the wonderful operations which were taking place on every side, it was surprising to myself that my own amazement should so quickly have subsided: my feelings became as those of one in a dream, and my mind

as the passive agent of the impressions presented to it from without. For a moment now, and only for a moment, did my thoughts recur to my own position: but I had scarcely time to admit the fear, that the enlargement and upward tendency of all things about me might soon leave me buried among the roots of the turf, or struggling like some of the minute creatures I had lately been regarding, to mount the sides of its smooth blades, when to my great relief I perceived that the strange growth had ceased, and the objects around me become fixed in their colossal, but not as yet ungraceful proportions. Indeed a wonderful feature of the change which had taken place, was the new beauty, fitness, and even delicacy, which the added size revealed in all things. Though the granulations of every leaf were as large as the palm of the hand, the texture of each granule was so complex, made up of so many and beautiful parts, so admirably compacted together, these parts again suggesting to the beholder such varied, new, and active combinations, with such a fulness and intensity of life, that but for the dreamy state of mind which softened all my emotions — even those the most pleasurable, — I should have been quite overcome by the contemplation.

As my gaze wandered unsettled over all the marvels which surrounded me, it chanced to fall once more on the group of water plants collected

together on the lake. They now covered a large surface, thirty or forty yards from end to end, and the flowers of different shapes and colours lodged upon the water, had the appearance of fantastic boats, each adapted to contain a single ærial form.

Could I be mistaken? I pressed my hands before my eyes, and looked again. The same illusion presented itself. There *was* an ærial form, which did not vanish, but gathered greater distinctness as I looked, till by degrees I again became reconciled to this new and lovely vision, as I had to all the wonders which had preceded it.

Seated on a flower-boat in the midst of the lake, was a creature the like of which I shall never see again. The little maid — for it was in human shape — rubbed her eyes, and appeared to be only just awaking from a very deep sleep. Her face, neck, and arms were of the tint of the lily when she stands up erect and pure, blushing in the farewell gaze of the sun, and her long yellow hair fell in shining ripples around a form, fairer, more supple, and adapted to lighter labours, than any I had ever beheld until that moment. She wore a little tunic, also of a very pure white, but the folds of which shaded into a delicate green, and a scarf of bright violet colour might be discerned between the flakes of her golden hair, crossing her left shoulder and winding about her waist.

When she had made an end of thrusting her little dimpled knuckles into her eyes, and looked about her, with those eyes wide open and full of a sweet confidence, at the strange and beautiful world spread out on every side, I perceived that the pretty orbs were of the same deep blue as the lake where it mirrored the sky; but I had little time to observe her longer in detail, for once fairly awake, her motions succeeded each other so rapidly, and were so expressive of her wonder and delight at all she was beholding as I could not help thinking for the first time, that it was as much as I could do to watch and to follow her.

The petals of the flower appeared not long to have opened and let her free, for they were not even yet expanded upon the water towards which they were sinking with a gradual motion. In this she appeared to think it necessary to assist them, for she made several rounds, visiting each in its turn, pressing her weight upon, smoothing and flattening it with her hand, aiding the ultimate development of the flower, and removing every fold which its leaves had contracted in its embryo state.

All this was performed with an air of business, and at the same time with an aptitude and skill, which now led me to infer that I had been mistaken in my first impression, as to the recent birth of the flower, as it appeared evident that

some previous practice and experience must have gone to the perfecting of these operations; but I had reason subsequently to know that this latter inference was incorrect.

It was not until every petal of her flower-boat was in its place; with every blemish removed, and every beauty revealed, that the little Flower-spirit ceased from her active labours, and renewed the delightful contemplations which her sense of the more important duties demanded of her, had interrupted. Throwing herself then down in the boat, which vibrated and danced upon the water with the light shock, she commenced a vivid review of everything which came within her range of vision. Things great and small were equally the objects of her regard, for as I before mentioned, I was afterwards able to ascertain with certainty that all were alike new to the little maid, while nothing appeared wholly to take her by surprise. What struck me, when I saw her as she sat there, laughing, and clapping her hands in an ecstacy of delight, at the frolicsome endeavours of an unwieldy cockchafer, who attempted to soar aloft on four shabby-looking wings, which were insufficient to sustain his huge body in the air,—what struck me in her manner I repeat, as she watched these graceless aspirations, was, that absolutely without previous knowledge or experience, she should have been so completely alive to the humour of the

situation, and have felt the disproportion between his bloated body and the little gauzy appendages he unfurled. But so it was, and this same quality of marvellous initiation I had occasion to observe in her throughout; there may be some among my friends who will smile at the remark, but it seemed to me akin to the intuition of genius. The butterflies were so beautiful, that their first visible presence did seem to strike her for a moment with awe. They were so large with their spread wings, and one of them, which came to congratulate her upon her advent among them, and on the spotless appearance of her vessel, swept down so grandly through the air, which broke into such rushing harmonies before him, that she seemed quite overwhelmed, and half terrified by the honour, which she nevertheless dwelt upon for long after with a sort of tremulous pride.

Among the other spirits like herself, one of which I had some time since discovered inhabited each of the flowery vessels which sat on the surrounding water, she was not long in selecting one or two, which for a time absorbed her whole attention.

The foremost of these was a young creature not much her senior in point of time, but excepting the youth they possessed in common, and the beauty for which each in her type was remarkable, there were few points of assimilation between the

two. Our new acquaintance was a gay brunette, with eyes which dazzled like jetty beads, and a mischievous smile which flickered over her face like a spark of light. She wore an amber tunic, had gathered up her long dark locks, the better to show her fine shape, and wore an ornament, which looked like a sprig of coral in her hair. In addition to this last-named decoration, she had, strung across her shoulder in place of a scarf, and looping up her garments at various points, a collection of objects, whose use or meaning it seemed impossible to determine. There were gauzy wings to be discerned among them, which caught and changed with every colour of the rainbow, in the restless motions of the wearer; there were morsels of skeleton leaves, and fragments of the petals of flowers, with the life still fresh in their veins; there were coloured scales from the wings of butterflies, and feathered darts, which had been arrested in their course as they bore the seeds of promise to a convenient place; while projecting between them, half covered with golden dust, were portions of minute and delicate limbs of creatures which had once been rejoicing in life.

With this eccentric beauty our fair little friend was most assiduous in her efforts to make acquaintance. She nodded at her, tossed about her golden hair in the sunlight, that its flash might attract her notice, and cut a thousand pretty

gambols, but with no avail. The brunette maiden having been very busy all the morning coquettishly arranging her abode, had now spread a couple of filmy wings,—with which I forgot to observe that both were furnished, and which served indeed as sails to their vessels,—and was fluttering in her grand toilet up and down, before a party of whose vicinity she affected a total unconsciousness, while it was evident they were occupying her every thought, and that it was for them all her arts of fascination were being displayed.

This party consisted of ten or twelve beings, some of them Flower-spirits, like the two I have described; but a portion of the group, and that by far the noisiest, was made up of winged creatures of the air, who kept up a continual hum as they imparted to their entertainer the news, the slander, or mere desultory gossip, with which their wandering habits supplied them.

In the centre of the little congregation, reclining greatly at his ease, was the individual who, from his airs and assumption, I adjudged to be the highest in rank. Unlike the spirits by whom he was surrounded, and the sylph-like creatures on whom my eyes had just rested, he was of massive and somewhat clumsy proportions, with tawny coloured hair, tawny skin, a dull eye, and dull demeanour; the idea occurred to me as I regarded him, that the current of his life must

have been diluted in order that it might suffice to the larger area over which it had to circulate. He was gaudily dressed in loose, flowing robes, with a profusion of stripes and bands in questionable taste, and listened with the air of a sultan to the lively discourse with which his followers endeavoured to amuse him; a work in which they succeeded so ill, that but for his occasional glances at objects which passed before him, and interruptions, occurring generally at the most salient points of the conversation, it might have been doubted how far he shared in the life and animation which was visible everywhere around him.

The name of this superb individual, as I afterwards learnt, was Bobadil, to which his enemies (and being wealthy and powerful and not a little arrogant, he had many,) added the title of the Bee-king; a name ingeniously devised by some of the more cunning of his flatterers, as being calculated at once to convey their sense of his dull and droning character, and to soothe his vanity, which was further protected by his very slow perceptions, by an empty sound of distinction. He was thus known by the pseudonym of Bobadil the Bee-king.

I soon discovered that it was he, and not his companions either collectively or individually, who was the object of the brunette's seductive

manœuvres. She continued for some time to move languidly before the group, or to sit sunning herself within range of their easy observation. Many of those who hovered about Bobadil eyed her with admiring glances, which she either refused to take note of, or returned with an affected scorn, far too demonstrative to be consistent with good breeding, as indeed it must be admitted that she scarcely stopped short of making "faces" at the more zealous and importunate of her devotees.

It was far otherwise that she comported herself towards the Bee-king. At one time as she passed she would adjust her string of trophies, as a fine lady might dispose to greater advantage her *parure*, and casting a languid glance at the object of her endeavours, pass on singing softly to herself; at the next she found it necessary to lift her graceful arms and affix more securely the ornament in her hair. Then she would throw herself down upon one of the sunny chequers of the lake, and stretching herself at full length over the glossy petals of her flower, turn their broad surface to the wind, and so raise up a flood of wild music which drew the regards of Bobadil towards her in spite of his pride and inanity. She appeared to possess a whole battery of little artifices, any one of which ought to have sufficed to the overthrow of an ordinary being were he

man or flower, but it seemed that all united were levelled in vain against the lazy peace of Bobadil the Bee-king.

I could not help marvelling at the perversity of taste which had led her to fix upon this drowsy spirit; for many of those who sought to beguile him of the tedium of his idle hours were possessed of a far better title to her distinction; but it appeared that Bobadil owed the high estimation in which he was held by his friends and neighbours, to the high estimation he failed not to entertain for himself. Here, as elsewhere, the charlatan who stopped short at simply deceiving others as to his titles and claims, was deemed but a clumsy professor of his art, and met with scanty success; it was essential above all things that he should completely deceive himself. Bobadil had not erred on this side. Although not nobly descended or greatly allied, not beautiful, not gifted, not graceful, not witty, or even wealthy beyond many of his less pretending compeers, he had a deep-rooted idea that he was superior to them all, and was thus enabled to lay tribute upon their admiration and respect in a manner that it never occurred to them to resist. He believed he had a right divine to have his interest consulted, his whims appealed to, his advice followed, his most villanous jests laughed at, and to take up as much room on the lake for

himself, and jostle and encroach as much upon the territory of others, as seemed good in his selfishness and conceit. I say he believed he had a right divine to all this, and so it would appear he had, since his faith established his claim.

The elfin coquette, whose pride had not in the least saved her from falling into the error of her neighbours with regard to Bobadil, still continued her covert assaults against his peace, though she was getting very impatient at her ill-success, and repeatedly varied her plan of operations in the hope of hitting upon some expedient which should at last pique his attention.

Passing over her and her aims, although he saw her full well, and perfectly appreciated her praiseworthy efforts, the eye of the Bee-king, which was quick enough in reality, in spite of its heavy seeming, rested, with an appearance not wholly of dissatisfaction, upon the form of the new comer, our fair little friend. He pointed her out to one of his parasites, whom the gesture and accompanying yawn interrupted in a gossiping story which he had hoped might have proved a conversational "hit."

"Ah, ah, truly, a very lovely creature!" buzzed the disappointed conversationist in reply.

"She must be a Valisneria of the Shadowy Bay," remarked the Bee-king; "I see the badge

of her family on her scarf; she is connected with the noblest of our aquatic stocks."

The parasite replied with a lively air, and making a great many reverences and indistinct excuses for his departure, wheeled off with the *mot* which had been checked in its utterance, and which he thought might be bestowed to advantage elsewhere.

"She does credit to her connexions," resumed the Bee-king, addressing the remainder of his circle collectively, without condescending to notice the defection of an individual; "she is worthy to be mated with the best upon the lake. Her mother,—yes, her mother, I thought I was correct, there sits the old lady a little in the rear,—was known to my mother in earlier days, but we dropped her, I scarce know how;—seconds need be seasons for keeping up an intercourse with all." The Bee-king, although somewhat out of breath with observations which were longer than he was accustomed to make at one time, went on to propound at intervals, in which, whatever might be their duration, he expected the attention of his auditors to be kept at full stretch, that the old lady of Valisneria was a widow, and a very stately dame,—that their family took its date from the flood,—that his mother was continually urging him to make choice of a wife,—that it was a pity his family, of whom he was the chief representa-

tive, should lose the distinction of adding another branch to the original tree, — that there was no conceivable objection to an union with the Valisnerias, no stain recorded in their annals. — that their daughters had never known a shadow of reproach, while their sons had been charged even with inconsiderate hardness; and finally wound up his tedious peroration by declaring his intention to confer the crowning glory on this house through an alliance with himself; and his determination to repair at once to the spot where the old lady resided, and apprise her of the intended honour.

Such a prompt resolution on the part of Bobadil the Bee-king, created not a little sensation among those who heard it: who, shaking out their finery, and getting their boats in trim, prepared to accompany their chief on his solemn progress. And now leaving this great spirit to make his way, with his *cortège*, over the smooth waters of the lake, puffing and sighing with the unwonted exertion, and with his heart so swelling with the thought of the proud happiness he was to bestow, that it nearly choked up his breath, we will return to the little yellow-haired maiden, whose company has been too long deserted for his.

Having sought to enlist the attention of the coquette by as many little devices, and with as

signal ill-success as she in her turn had approved in her attempts upon Bobadil, she abandoned the effort after a time in despair, and again busied herself in contemplation of, or in intercourse with, the thousand other new creatures and objects with which she was surrounded.

Of all things I still admired, as I had done at first, her power of adapting herself to the novel circumstances in which she was placed. She seemed literally to require no teaching and no guide, losing not the enjoyment or rapid appreciation of a word or a look, from a moment's inaptitude in decyphering it. Once only I fancied she seemed puzzled; it was at the pertinacity with which the beautiful maiden whose friendship she coveted above all things in the world, confined herself to Bobadil's neighbourhood; but she soon turned her thoughts from a subject too deep for her, and catching sight of the Bee-king's grand air and empty inane looks, and finding him the object of so much assiduity, she burst into a peal of the gayest laughter ever heard, holding her little sides with her hands, as if in fear that the musical cackination should crack them. An admonishing shake and a look from her mother, who chanced to be near her at the time, recalled her very speedily to order; and she sat after this until Bobadil departed on a mission so nearly connected with herself, very demurely like a chidden

child as she was. Even up to the time of that lordly spirit's arrival upon his visit to her relative, the maternal reproof—probably the first she had received—had kept her quite silent and sad; and thus it happened that she overheard a great part of the conversation which then took place concerning her.

At first when she listened to his demand for herself in marriage, she was much frightened, and anticipating that her presence might shortly be required to ratify the coming treaty, held a whole shower of sparkling tears in readiness, and heroically resolved, in case of their failure to turn from her so terrible a doom, that she would guard the fortress of her heart and beautiful person to the last gasp of her life. A wonderful spirit came now to her aid, just as a wonderful knowledge had manifested itself before; and it remains to be doubted, if, in spite of her sense of filial duty, the magnificent Bee-king would have succeeded in her capture, had the elder lady's reception of his suit been such as to authorise him to make the attempt.

Unhappily for him it was not so. The widow of Valisneria, of whose haughty pride in her high connections his knowledge should have made him wary, was so highly ruffled at the arrogant assumption of his manner, that, although far from unconscious of the advantages offered by such an

union for her child, — advantages the nature of which, in her particular case, I was as yet unable to appreciate, — she took care to let him understand that an alliance with one of her ancient stock was an affair not to be concluded in a single interview, and not to be reckoned on in many ; that with their many and wide-spread relations, he must know that there were others than themselves to consult on such a subject ; that her daughter, being very young and fair, and unlearned in the life she had only just entered upon, had abundance of time and many opportunities before her ; and that it was therefore but fair to allow her a short season, in which she might haply submit to her guardian's approval, some choice congenial to herself. At the same time the old lady, who with her grave and stately manner was not wanting in high-bred tactics, assured him that the little heart he coveted was at present untouched, and, so far as the child herself was concerned, unsought, and hinted with a faded smile that it might rest in a measure with himself to make the choice she should allow to the maiden, one favourable to his dearest hopes.

When the mother of his wished-for bride had rounded off these periods with a calm and dignified ease, in which everything betokened a quaint old-fashioned breeding, and nothing one particle of affectation or conceit, Bobadil felt him-

self called upon, he knew not how, to torture his clumsy person into the lowest reverence he had ever yet ventured upon, and to leave the good lady to herself, which he did with a faint mixture of his old assurance struggling through as abject and crestfallen an air as ever was awarded to man or spirit in return for his sins or follies.

What greatly aggravated his discomfiture was the thought, that those he had taken to be the witnesses of his triumph would surely be the messengers of his defeat; and he returned to the place from whence he came in a mood which even his enemies might have pitied, and wishing all pretty maidens and grand old mothers a quiet resting place at the bottom of the lake.

In the mean time, the mind of the little lady who was the cause of all this mortification was regaining its equilibrium; and shedding, for the more complete relief of her own heart, a few drops of that shower of tears which had been intended to subdue to her wishes those of her mother and Bobadil, she sate herself back in her fairy bark, and yielded herself up to the full enjoyment of the calming influences of the summer's day, doubly grateful after the brief turmoil of her first sorrow. She did not seek her mother, of whom I suspected she stood in awe, to confide to her the emotions with which the conversation she had overheard had possessed her; and that rigid

dame, one of the orthodox old school of flowers, had no thought at present of communicating to the little one the views she ultimately entertained for her.

But the consolations of a companionship with one more nearly of her own years, were soon to be the portion of our little friend. The dark maiden had continued, with an unwontedly stately step and careless air, to parade to and fro on the old spot for some time after Bobadil's desertion; and then having returned home to weep a few moments in anger and sorrow, had smoothed her glossy hair, in which she adjusted an additional ornament, and bethinking her of the amiable advances she had so coldly regarded at the time they were made, resolved now to sally forth again, and to seek the distractions of friendship.

The joy of the fair little spirit, who appeared in no way to have inherited the pride of her race knew no bounds when she saw her approach. She hurried out to meet her, and would have clasped her in her arms, had not the other caught and playfully drawn together her two extended hands, which she imprisoned in one of her own, while she patted her gaily on the cheek.

"Soft speed the hours, my dear," said the coquette, using the customary form of greeting. "I know who you are, at least, I know from

what stock you are descended, and you have only to tell me your name."

"My name is Neria," responded the little maid, while I was at a loss to know how she could have divined it, for she had only come into the world a few hours before, and I had been keeping her within eye and ear-shot ever since.

"Neria?" repeated her new friend, "a very pretty name. You are Neria, and I am Sundew, or Willy-nilly as some of our wags will have it, for I am one who will never be thwarted in my humours. You will hear more of me from others than I can tell you of myself; but as of all things I abhor false modesty, I may as well say that you will hear nothing further to my disadvantage than that I have broken a few hearts, very brittle ones they were! and have turned a few heads which were never of the most steady!"

"Ah no, dear Sundew," cried Neria turning pale, "it is not true, you can never have done this!"

"Done what, little coward?" asked Sundew laughing; "of course I have done it, and shall do it again, and so will you, for so pitiful as you look at this moment." And the dark maiden laughed heartily, seeming to find a high delight in shocking the other out of her sober little senses.

Neria, in return to this last sally, could only

ejaculate "No, no!" and raise her white shoulders quite out of her tunic, and clasp her hands with an imploring gesture, as if her gay friend had possessed the power of working out the fulfilment of her words. To which Willy-nilly replied, "We shall see, we shall see!" and murmured something to the effect that their charms were not given them for nothing, any more than their wings or aught else which pertained to them, but were meant to be employed to the best of their owner's power; and that it was an instinct so to use them, or at least it had been so with her. Having uttered which sentiments she turned, and catching sight of a figure which was hovering near, half-retreated for a moment within the raised petals of her flower, then sighed a very soft sigh so artfully sustained that every leaf fluttered in it as it slowly returned to the water, and waved her hand and languidly smiled at as perfect a type of a woe-begone lover as even she could have desired to look upon. After this, considering that she had sufficiently indulged her own light mood for the present, and dazzled and startled her new little friend, she sat down quietly beside her, and the two maidens entered into a whispered and earnest conversation.

Sundew, though still very young, was the elder of the two by what, according to their computation of time, would have been at least a year;

and her mother Zobeide, enjoying a less distinguished position, and being less stringent in her notions than the parent of Néria, she had seen a good deal of the life of the lake, in circles which had not always been the most select,—a doubtful advantage, of which her natural acuteness had enabled her to avail herself to the utmost. She related to Néria many traits of foreign courts and manners, which were much discoursed of in the society she frequented, and which were doubly interesting to the little maid, as they served to illustrate the point of the many gossiping communications which were being brought to her companion by great winged messengers who were employed as the mediums of carrying on intercourse between different states. There were not wanting also those whose information was of a more private and personal character; but whatever might be the nature of the communications they had to make, all came to Sundew for the almost sure reward of a bright smile and pleasant word, and not a few added to their budget of news the tidings that the most modest and lovely of high-born maidens had dawned upon their world that day.

While Néria and Willy-nilly were conversing, I learnt many things unknown to me before, not indeed as information which the elder maiden gave the younger, but incidentally from the sub-

jects they touched upon in their discourse being equally familiar to them both. It appeared, among other things, that in this world of flowers, a day corresponded to the year of that from which I had come; that the morning, the noon, the evening and night, represented with them the four seasons in their customary order of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. That the latter was the period of their most brilliant fêtes, when the coolness of the air, and comparative absence of observation, made the exercise of dancing most desirable; that an admirable order and harmony was preserved among the class of spirits to which they belonged, and that their lives alternated between the sweet toils to which their natures led them, a soft voluptuous ease, and all manner of wild and innocent delights. But I could not become familiar with this glowing world, or mark, as I listened, the changes which were going on around me, without feeling that, in spite of the light spirits and happy confidence of these creatures, they were beset with various forms of calamity, and threatened on many sides with danger and death. They were occasionally the victims of pestilence and of divers epidemic diseases; they were not unfrequently swept away by storms of wind, or submerged beneath the waters of the lake, and had often been known to be the prey of monsters both amphibious and

of the deep, as well as of many other misfortunes equally terrible and unforeseen. The contemplation of all this led me, as was natural, to take a deeper interest in the graceful beings who fluttered and talked, and laughed and made merry, in such happy unconsciousness before me; and so soon as I could summon my thoughts from their uneasy wanderings, I resumed my occupation of listener.

Sundew, who had been all the time the chief speaker, and whose vain and mischievous heart had expanded before the admiring warmth of Neria, had now quitted the more general topics of interest which had previously engaged her, and was making her friend the confidante of subjects the most delicate and personal which can stir the soul of a flower.

“Of what avail is it,” said she, having exchanged her wild air for one of demure sentimentality, “of what avail is it that I can make captives at will of all whom I approach, if there is one proud heart which resists my sway? which moves in its own grand course all-sufficient to itself, and heeds not the poor flower which so many are striving to gather, but which asks only to bloom or to fade on that one cold breast? Oh Neria, happy Neria, you have never known this!”

“It cannot be, Sundew, it cannot be!” cried Neria with generous warmth; “it is impossible

that one on whom you have bestowed your love, can be insensible to the value of the gift. Among all I have beheld, there breathes not the being who is worthy of you. To pair with you, beautiful Sundew, he should be the noblest, the most worthy,—the sovereign and lord of the lake! You are too kind when you give them such bright looks and sweet words. Who can he be—this cold dull spirit, who has received more than all of them unmoved?”

Nëria was quite red with friendly indignation as Willy-nilly hastened to reply.

“Alas, dearest, you are right; he *is* cold and hard at least; but can it be that you have failed to be struck with that majestic presence, or to have heard through others of the fame of one, whose greatness is a byword among us? Look yonder, and you will see the lofty attributes which have subdued the wayward heart of your friend!”

Nëria looked as Sundew directed, and saw—Bobadil, who, returned from his mission to her mother, sate surrounded as before in his own domains, gasping and complaining of his sufferings from the heat.

So different, as we have seen, was the impression produced by the great spirit upon the untaught but acute mind of Nëria, to that which he imposed upon the rest of her world, that she was in some danger, as she regarded him for the second

time of breaking out into a peal of laughter as hearty, and far more inopportune, than that for which she had before received the reproof of her mother: but recollecting that this inflated personage, the beloved of Sundew, had a short while before been a suitor for her hand, the idea of all the unhappiness which the fact must involve for her friend, was presented to her mind, and she became grave and sad in a moment.

“Not him, dearest Sundew,” she exclaimed almost in tears, “Oh do not tell me it is him you love. I know more of him by far than you can do, and what I have to tell you must seem cruel, but I feel it is best that you should hear it. I, your little friend, may be the means of saving you, beautiful one, from a fate so beneath your deserts. He who sits there—distinguished by you as he has been—has but a short time ago demanded me in marriage of my mother!”

“And your mother consented?” asked Sundew breathlessly.

“Yes, no,” returned Neria; “that is, she said he might try to win me; but oh, Sundew! I would fly from him to the furthest corner of the lake!”

“I doubt if he would follow you so far, my dear,” said the dark maiden, who in her real vexation had dropped her sentimental tone. “Bobadil the Bee-king loves his ease, and with his figure,

he is not far wrong in setting himself up ~~for~~ a mark, rather than a dart. He will get hit in the heart some day,—let us turn to pleasanter themes.”

“Alas! dear Sundew,” said Néria, to whom the light mood of her friend was inexplicable, “I fear you are very unhappy. Fear not to open your heart to me; I cannot love Bobadil as you do, but I can weep over anything which grieves you.”

“I thank you, my lovely friend,” returned Sundew, “I see you have a whole cataract in readiness, and could wet us both to the skin, but I have no particular inclination for tears at this moment. However, you are a sweet little creature, and I should commend the Bee-king’s taste had he fallen in love with your innocent face instead of the good old name which I suspect went for more than it ought to have done. Come, make yourself happy, I will promise you that Bobadil shall never again terrify you with his advances; and now kiss me, and let us continue the best friends on the lake.” Néria’s soft arms were wound in a moment around the neck of her friend, whom she vowed repeatedly she loved better than it was possible for her ever to love any one else; and Sundew, whose elastic spirit had regained its tone so soon as she promised to herself a signal and speedy revenge on Bobadil, returned her expressions of affliction

with equal goodwill. So completely did little Nöria abandon herself to her affectionate demonstrations, that heedless of her footing upon the polished edge of her flower, she lost her balance, and slipped from off it into the water, which instantly closed over her bright head. But almost before her companion had found time to scream, she reappeared upon the surface, rubbing her eyes and laughing; and though she confessed to having been rather frightened at first, she declared herself highly delighted that accident had thus introduced her to the novel sport of diving and gambolling, in the limpid water of the lake. She seemed in no disposition speedily to desist from this sport, and after every fresh manœuvre which her wanton fancy dictated, called to her friend to join her in her play; from which Sundew always excused herself in the fear of disarranging her attire. Never was seen anything more graceful than these innocent gambols of this child of the soil and the stream; and if it should be thought that these transports of infantile gaiety, were unbecoming in a creature whose development was so mature, it must be remembered that Nöria was one of a race in whom knowledge is no gradual and painful acquisition, requiring for its pursuit a mind early attuned to earnest thought, and that her heart had never yet been awake to the consciousness of the sources

it could supply for weal or for woe. To dart after the many bright things which inhabited the water, appeared to afford her infinite delight; but after catching and stroking them for a moment she invariably let them go, telling them they should not be less happy and free, because it was permitted to her for a time to enjoy herself with them in their own domain. They soon seemed to know her, and even to enter into her sport, now lingering for a time to draw her on, and anon darting off with a speed which defied her pursuit. A favourite variation of her play was to get upon one of the pointed petals of her flower, and falling from it backwards into the water, go floating on with her upturned smiling face, and her wet hair spread out upon the water, or streaming behind her like a knot of golden serpents. Her chief amusement of all, however, appeared to consist in diving about and beneath her friend, and reappearing suddenly above the water, before or behind her, now on this side and then on that. To wring from Sundew an involuntary exclamation of surprise, was an exquisite enjoyment that even incited her to renewed and more vigorous exertions.

When these pastimes had been continued long enough to become fatiguing, Nèria returned, her gay spirits still all in a flutter, to her boat, and having adjusted her tunic and scarf, which the

drops of water appeared to fall off and leave as dry and spotless as before, she leant over the side of the flower to wring her golden hair. Suddenly, and when the work was only half complete, she clasped her hands, and letting fall an exclamation of admiration and delight, remained transfixed, gazing down into the water as one in the contemplation of an ecstasie vision. In vain Sundew pressed her with questions as to the nature of the object which engrossed her; she remained deaf and blind to everything which addressed her from another quarter than the crystal depth, and Willy-nilly, overcome with surprise and curiosity, pressed her light bark to her side, and pushing her away with a playful gesture, peered down into the transparent water from the same point.

Scarcely had she done so when she fell back into her vessel, a deadly paleness overspreading her face, and Nöria, still intent but upon one sole object in the whole wide world, resumed her contemplations, without regarding her friend. It was only when this last placed a trembling hand upon her arm, that she looked up. A moment had wrought upon her face a change, marked enough to have been the work of years, but very unlike it in character. Time was never yet known to write upon perishable material an inscription so sweet, so gentle, and touching. The smiles

were gone from the lovely lip, but a happiness most strange, deep, and exquisite was unfolded in their place. She looked full at Sundew without regarding her, for her vision appeared to have absorbed, so to say, some beloved object, which it took with it and fed upon wherever it rested.

“Come away, Nëria!” cried Sundew in an accent of terror, “come away, or you are lost. I have heard of some strange peril which besets the daughters of your house; my mother could tell you more,—all know it though it is rarely talked of;—who could have dreamed that you should have fallen into it now!”

“Did you see him?” murmured Nëria, — “he is so beautiful.”

“Ah, she is lost already!” exclaimed Sundew. “Turn away, do not look—never think upon him more. He may be beautiful—he might be gifted ~~as~~ a creature never yet was gifted,—but I know that he is not for you. Do not ask me: I could not if I would, tell you all,—it is a mysterious fate which is beckoning you, Nëria. Look around, — do as I do, smile on many, or love only one,—but let it not be *him*, if you value his peace or your own!” The terror of her friend communicated itself, though slowly, to Nëria, and she clung to her as though she would implore her to save her from herself.

“Go to your mother,” continued Sundew imploringly, “she alone can save you: go to her and tell her all, and she will counsel and advise you, as I, in my inexperience, know not how to do.” Neria, trembling, promised to do as she was desired, and only prayed for a little more time, in which, by communion with herself, she might recover from the turmoil of her spirits, and gain more strength; and added that to this end she should wish to be left alone. On this Sundew kissed her tenderly, and commending her to all good spirits, withdrew; and notwithstanding that she had done so with some show of reluctance, she experienced a grateful sense of ease and serenity, as soon as she had turned her back upon a spot, which, associated with a mysterious and only half-comprehended calamity, had become so terrible to her idea. She turned repeatedly to look after Neria, and felt satisfied to find her each time lying in the same position in which she had left her, extended in her floating vessel and gazing up into the cloudless sky. And still so long as there was any hope that the breezes should convey the sound to her ear, Sundew called to her friend, repeating the admonition louder and louder as the distance increased between them, “Go to your mother! go to your mother!”

CHAP. VI.

“ As a wild maiden, with love-drinking eyes,
 Sees in sweet dreams a beaming youth of glory,
 And wakes to weep, and ever after sighs
 For that bright vision,
 Ev'n so, alas ! is my life's passion story.”

Alexander Smith.

NOTWITHSTANDING the warnings of Sundew, Neria, while she fully purported to profit in time by the friendly counsels of her late companion, preferred remaining for the moment alone. So strange to her was the new animus which pervaded every pulse of her being, fraught suddenly with so deep a meaning appeared the many voices of nature which whispered around her, so different from what it had lately been seemed the whole earnest life within her and without, that she required some period of retirement within her own heart, in which she might become acquainted, and, so to speak, *at home*, with her altered self.

Freed from the contagion of Sundew's terror, the emotion which was stirring within her soon conquered her momentary panic, and re-asserted its sway ; while the memory of all she had heard concerning the mysterious doom which threatened both herself, and the being whose impress had

stamped itself so profoundly on her sensitive heart, added a wild charm to all she experienced, and gave to the fond feelings with which she dwelt back upon that interchange of glances, the ineffable sweetness which attends upon stolen delights.

If all the other objects in nature looked grand and vast as they loomed in the increased proportions I have before attempted to describe, how large and far away looked the blue vault of heaven to which Neria raised his eyes, as if there she saw the fittest symbol of that unfathomable love, she believed she had read in those of her adored. As she dwelt upon this idea, every happy suggestion, every sweet hope, all things beautiful and true with which she was acquainted, formed around it as its fitting centre, and gathered from the association a charm, which now to be dispossessed of, would have caused each to fall flat and profitless into its place, to be shunned or disregarded for ever after.

The vibrations of her former fear were still too keenly felt by the little flower-spirit to admit of her seeking the beloved image again ; and indeed the impression made by it on her soft heart was still so very vivid, as scarcely to require such a renewal. So she reclined quite motionless and outwardly still, in her fairy boat, while every thing around seemed to be doing homage to her

mood, in sighs, and murmurs, and songs of love. And if her pulses throbbed not so evenly as they had done, and if she was sensible of a trouble before unknown, was she not more blest in her unsatisfied yearnings than in all the aimless fulfilments which had preceded them?

I know not what measure of time may have passed while Nöria was thus absorbed in sensations which in one less inexperienced in all sorrow, might have taken a sadder tone from the circumstances which had gone before; I only remember that when I turned my eyes from the lovely apparition stretched in a sort of passive ecstasy over the unfolded leaves of her flower, I perceived that the sun was making some progress towards noon, and threw down the chequered shade of the giant chestnut leaves, upon the water near the spot on which she reclined. It was the sight of these enormous shadows which awakened in me a momentary curiosity as to the objects which projected them, and in order to gratify it, I cast my eyes up at the leviathan branches: it would be difficult to describe the emotion with which I remarked that one of the leaves which hung out far over the lake had become faded, and rustled in the breath of the light summer breeze with a tremulous motion, as if its tenure on the bough were insecure. A terrible apprehension overcame me as I carried a rapid glance down in a perpendicular line

from the leaf to the water beneath it,—that glance lead me precisely to the spot, at which Neria in her floating bower, was reposing upon the bosom of the lake.

If this leaf, this knotted framework of succulent wood, and tissue of fibre and pulp, should become detached, and overwhelm her where she rested,—not perhaps causing her instant death, but shutting her out in a grim cell, from the light of day in which she so innocently rejoiced,—how terrible would be her doom! I was impotent to avert a calamity, the bare apprehension of which filled me with dread, for the leaf was far beyond my reach, and possibly as much too unwieldy for my management; so I endeavoured to dismiss from my mind the fearful thought, reflecting that there was but little wind astir, and that in the event of the dreaded object falling down from its high place, there were many chances which might operate to direct its course otherwise than to that spot which had become to me the centre of so absorbing an interest.

Still uneasy in spite of my reasonings, I looked again upon my lovely spirit. She had risen from her recumbent attitude, and looking wistfully around, was resolving within herself to do at last what it had perhaps been better she had performed at first. She was gazing askance at her mother, who sat at some distance with her back towards

her, and was mustering all her courage for the interview she had promised to seek.

As she stood thus a sudden impulse overcame her; now that she was so soon to hear the fiat from the maternal lips, her sanguine hopes grew somewhat paler than they had been, and she feared even that a ban might be placed for ever on all further intercourse between herself and the being already so adored. She trembled at the thought of bursting the constraints of duty, she trembled still more at what might be the alternative; and thus torn with conflicting feelings, she yielded to the strongest, as nature taught her,—knelt down, and with her loving soul swimming in her eyes, gazed once more through the transparent depths of the lake at the haunting image which lurked beneath it. It was a long, long look that she took this time; Sundew, her mother, none were near, to spoil the sweetness of her draught of happiness, by mingling with it suggestions of doubt and fear; there was only the voice of wilful nature crying aloud in her heart, “Look long, look lovingly, this look may be thy last! Only from heaven can come a joy like this: what am I—a poor flower—that I should resist it!” So she gazed and gazed, and if prudence were heard at all, she was able to silence it with the assurance, that she was only dutifully looking the last farewell, which the sternest of monitors would

acknowledge to be due from her, though all the time the glad tumult of the little heart which throbbed beneath her snowy tunic, gave too emphatic a denial to the assertion. And all the time, too, the leaf on the bough trembled more and more in the light breeze; but I tried to silence my fears, and believe that the words of Sundew had given rise to needless forebodings.

After a score of these sweet farewells, every one of which she had vowed to herself should be the last, the little maid tore herself away, and freshly armed with the courage of a love which she now felt fully assured, could not be otherwise than victorious over all obstacles, she bore away her beating heart into the presence of her mother.

The grand old lady was alone, as indeed she was always, except on the occasion of a few visits of ceremony made her by her neighbours, and rarely returned by her. For all companionship she sought the memory of some great, deep sorrow of her youth; with this she sat ever in silent converse, and it imparted a sternness to her ordinary manner, and threw a gloom upon all which surrounded her, which caused her society in time to be as little sought for by others, as theirs since the period of her mourning, had been cultivated by her. A heavy shadow brooded over that part of the lake where the lady had fixed her abode; the brightest,

sunlight failed to penetrate it, and the darkness seemed even to deepen about the form of the widow, as she sate lonely and silent apart, when all others were busy and gay.

It was into this lugubrious presence that Néria came with the fresh young hopes she had brought with her from brighter scenes, and which seemed at once to contract, and fade, before the ungenial influence of the present one. As she stood trembling and hesitating, seeking in vain for some artless phrase with which to open the communication she had come hither to make, her mother perceived her, and looking full into her face with her calm passionless gaze, demanded what it was that she wanted.

The aspect of the lady's face, and the tone of her voice as she said this, were so little reassuring, that our poor little spirit felt it more than ever difficult to begin; but fearing to awaken her displeasure if she remained silent, she faltered some words to the effect that she had been bidden by Sundew to crave the benefit of her experience on a grave matter; and paused in the hope of being questioned further.

It was at this moment that the mother of Néria, turning her eyes upon her for the second time in their interview, caught sight of the tresses of yellow hair, which, not yet dry from her bath in the lake, enfolded the graceful limbs of the

younger spirit with their damp flakes. A look of sudden and vehement feeling, replaced the wonted calm of her face, as she sprung towards her, and grasping a handful of the wet locks, the better to assure herself of their condition, exclaimed, in a voice almost suffocated by her emotions,—

“Unhappy child! victim like your mother of a fatal destiny,—you have no need to tell me more; I know all, all,—you are lost beyond hope, and beyond redemption!” The willow fell back into her place within the shrivelled and semi-transparent leaves of the flower, which closed around her as a curtain, and a torrent of tears, the first she had shed for long, refreshed the memory of a sorrow which was never absent from her heart.

It may appear strange that there was so little of sympathy between this mother and child, more especially when the fate which the former predicted for the latter, so nearly resembled her own in its sadder features. But thus it was: I mention only the fact as it presented itself to my perceptions, and do not seek to explain it. The mother, as she sat weeping her passionate tears over the sacred sorrow which the misfortune of her child had revived, saw herself young, fair, happy, and beloved once more; and while she lingered with fond regret over all those features of her own case which that of Neria recalled, harshly blamed her in her heart

for yielding to influences which she herself had been unable to resist.

Nëria, on her part stood aloof, and weeping her separate tears, which, in spite of the gentleness of her nature, had as little reference to that secret grief which the mother raised up, rather as a barrier than a point of contact between the two, as the sorrow of the widow had with her's. And thus these two fond, earnest, hearts remained,—near by nature and by circumstance,—but strangely separated for ever.

The elder spirit was the first to speak.

“Nëria, did *he* see? or was the fault yours only, which would have tempted him to his ruin and your own?”

“Mother, he saw me,” replied Nëria through her fast falling tears; and she trembled more violently than before, at what appeared to her to be the occult penetration of the widow.

“It is worse then even than I feared,” returned the latter; “there is only one hope that remains to you. Listen to me, child, weakling! and blindly obey me in all things: do this, and it may be you are not even yet wholly lost,—refuse, and the result will be a sorrow, which at present you are too young, too careless, and too heedless, even to conceive the depth of.” Nëria did not speak, only her sobs were more audible than before. She felt not less guilty than miserable,

as she stood there cowering beneath the accusation of some unimaginable transgression, her face covered up in her small outspread hands, and only her pretty crown, from which her golden hair radiated like the beams of a star, bowed down to meet the cold glance of her mother. The widow continued:

“ You must banish him—whom to think of would be ruin worse than death—from your thoughts as from your heart,—you must never recur to his idea. This is the first of the commands I lay upon you, and the sum of all the rest. You must employ yourself in a perpetual round of the light and pleasant toils allotted to our race, and cultivate in your intervals of leisure the society of the careless and light-hearted creatures,—the summer friends,—who gladly enough in your life’s merry morning, will respond to your most casual appeal. In the meantime, return to those brighter influences which you left when you came here,—for this retirement supplies not, as I have well proved, the incitements which might lead you to forget,—and I will seek among my ancient friends, some one with whom you may safely dwell until your season of danger is passed. Before this can be arranged I will send your friend Sundew to bear you company,— she is gay and cheerful, and not quite without discretion; and later perhaps you may find an inducement to

lay aside your folly, more potent than the suggestions of friendship, or maternal regard."

As the pale spirit of the faded flower concluded this sentence, she approached her sorrowful child, and pressing a cold kiss on her brow, waved an intimation that she might depart, and prepared herself to move slowly away, on her self-imposed mission in the opposite direction.

Nëria turned from the shadowy spot in ready obedience to her mother's gesture, and sought that from which she had come but a few moments before, filled with the love and hope which she believed was to have moulded everything to her will. How she reached the scene of her brief life's most welcome experiences, she never could have told. Near by as it was, an existence of sorrow seemed to have passed over her in the interval: all the incidents that had occurred since the first fatal discovery of that other life which seemed necessary to the completion of her own, adjusted itself to her perceptions like forms resolved out of vapour, mingling confusedly, and returning to it again, being strangely compounded of ecstasy, doubt, and terror. Her simple faculties were bewildered and paralysed, something threatened her,—was it true that it also threatened *him*? In her nameless fear, the petals of her flower raised themselves instinctively from the water, and contracted around the shrinking form

of the pale spirit they enshrined. She would have dropped down in their midst, and have hid herself in their friendly shelter from an existence which was not such as she had dreamed, but there were duties she would **not** forego, and a passive strength in the little spirit which made it impossible to her to quit her post. The fairy thing over which she had been appointed the guardian, was as a minute link in the complicated chain of the universe, and would never be wanting through sin of hers while aught remained to the fulfilment of its destiny.

It is true there was no new cause for her fears: her mother had only confirmed that which Sundew had told her already, but she had confirmed it in a manner which carried with it a dreadful assurance. Neither had done more than hint at a calamity, which must follow her further converse with her beloved; the one possibly because she was unacquainted with its nature, the other from a deficiency of confidence in her youth. To grope her way all unaided and in darkness, through this labyrinth of doubt was impossible to Neria, to whom thought appeared only to be accorded when it was at once to put on visibility in action; a sense of some inexplicable weight, which, falling down upon her in the moment of her soul's gladdest expansion, had crushed and was pressing out its life, was all of which she was

conscious, as she threw herself down in her flowery boat, and covered her tearful eyes to shut out the light of the sun.

Must I confess it? The whole time that Nèria had been cowering and weeping before the stern face of her mother, her timid heart suffering all the dread and anguish of which it was capable, a feeling of satisfaction was in operation in my own mind, consoling me for much that I experienced in genuine sympathy with her. Let those who look over these pages consult for a moment their own hearts, and they will probably find there how small is the amount of acknowledgment rendered by them to the saddest inward experiences of their friends, in proportion to that which they accord to their physical sufferings, and feel small surprise that as I marked the increasing vibration of the mighty leaf which overhung the spot she had quitted, I rejoiced that she was away from its vicinity,—no matter on what errand of despair. My chief hope lay in the possibility of its becoming detached, and falling down in her absence; but there was not so much as a breath of wind to complete the work which various delicate operations of nature, and the incumbent weight of the object itself, were combining slowly to effect, and thus my anxiety was destined to be renewed with tenfold poignancy on her return.

Poor sad little Nēria, exhausted with the strife of her heart, and unconscious of any other danger than that coveted and mysterious one from which the belief that she was shortly to be removed for ever by her mother, constituted her heaviest grief, lay silently extended in the flower, which rocked gently to and fro upon the bosom of the lake, as if it knew, and would fain ease, her sorrow. A sweet and penetrating perfume, exhaled by the sun now in its zenith, rose up about her, and acting upon her senses as a narcotic, stilled her into sleep and sweet forgetfulness of her woes. With her flushed cheek, and the tears which stole through her fingers, she looked as innocent and as profoundly sad as a child, who has dropped asleep weeping, and having no experience of the laws of mutability and forgetfulness, of change and reproduction, which govern the world and the nature of which we are a part, dreams that its awakening will be in unabated sorrow, and its grief have no end.

I was aroused from these contemplations by the quick passage of some animal through what appeared to be the jungle grass at my side. It flew, with the speed almost of thought, up the vast trunk of the tree, and into its huge spreading arms. I was startled for the moment out of all self-possession, and in the confusion of ideas which so many strange sights had induced, it seemed to

me that the animal must be one of those antediluvian monsters common to the earlier phases of our planet; though at the same time its activity, so marvellous in a creature of its mammoth proportions, struck me as ill agreeing with the rude and simple organisms of primeval creation. I watched the animal with some interest, and what is strange, without a thought of fear, as it sported in the branches of the tree, or, with its large brush-like tail turned over towards its head, shook its black muzzle with a movement rapid and knowing as that of a bird, and rubbed it heartily with its paws. These movements, which would have been perfectly appropriate in one of the smaller species of monkeys, affected me as so irresistibly droll in this monster, that I was on the point of giving way to a sudden fit of laughter, when a frightful thought flashed upon my mind, diverting the current of my ideas on the instant. Too terrified in the first moments of apprehension, to turn my eyes upon the little flower-spirit, I looked for the withered leaf where it hung when I had seen it last on the bough. The creature in some one of its rapid motions had shaken the branch to which the slightest ligament had attached it, — it was gone, its five spreading fingers were contracted as it lay a compact and impenetrable dome upon the water, — it had alighted, and was covering the spot where she had been!

I will not dwell upon what I experienced upon making this discovery: my feelings were so painful as to make any recurrence to them unpleasing. The worst of what I had dreaded had come to pass, and I accused myself bitterly for having suffered my watchful gaze, all powerless as it might have been to avert the misfortune, to have been turned away from her for a moment. But regret and reproaches came all too late; Neria was there, in the gentle sleep from which the leaf in its soft transit through the air would probably have failed to awaken her, shut out for ever from the light of the sun, and cut off from all intercourse with her kind.

Ignorant of the laws which directed her being, I knew not that this barrier to the free transmission of light, and obstacle to the changeful breezes, might not prove to her a lingering and horrible death, — a fate whose only alternative appeared to be a living tomb. I felt that I could have sought over the world for some means to give her aid, but I was incapable of rising or moving from the spot, and my wildest accents transmitted no sound. I was at length quite wearied with my vain efforts and sorrowful conjectures: one thing only was certain, — the unhappy Neria was there, without hope, — alone, buried with her early griefs beneath that all-obscuring canopy.

CHAP. VII.

"I never yet saw man
How wise, how noble, young, or fairly featured.
But she would spell him backwards,

* * * * *

If it prove so, then loving goes by haps ;
Some Cupids kill with arrows, some by traps."

Much Ado about Nothing.

I HAVE said that I would not dwell upon my feelings, nor will I ; and equally unable should I be to explain, if it were my wish, how, or in what order, the knowledge of the other incidents which must have been passing during the time I was occupied with the fated Neria, was brought to my perceptions. Whether the state into which I had passed had endowed me with a limited kind of omniscience, so that while opposite events were enacting, I was present at each in one half of my thought, or whether I received them at second-hand from the spirits of the flowers with such graphic details as led me to adopt the impressions made on their senses as my own, I cannot say ; all that my readers must expect to hear from me, is the relation of the circumstances as they occurred, to the best of my showing.

When Sundew left Neria after her first fatal interview with the mysterious hero of the lake,

she hastened at once to her mother, to gather from her lips a confirmation — she feared it would not be a refutation — of the vague whispers which attached such calamitous consequences to the loves of the daughters of the stock of Valisneria with their kinsmen of the stream. She had little hope of finding the dame at home, but thought that a troop of little mischievous aspirants, her brothers and sisters, might be able to inform her of the whereabouts of their common parent. Contrary to her expectations, she discovered Zobeide in their midst, setting her household, which was in a continual state of disturbance from the struggles of a young, growing family, in order. Indeed, a notable fact of which I became cognisant during my observations in this new world, was, that however much given some elder members of the community might be to busy themselves with the affairs of their neighbours, there were none who carried this friendly solicitude so far as to forget their own. Zobeide whom we now see fluttering about, giving a touch here, dealing a blow there, and bringing all into order with a surprising activity, was a diminutive creature, dark like her daughter, and having perhaps been handsome like her in her youth, but being up to this time unfortunately not in the least *faded*, though very shrunken and *withered*, her piercing bead-like black eyes, and

the jetty hair which encompassed her little spare face, imparted to her an appearance which I can only describe as "uncanny." But as in this the busy little body was nothing to blame, nature and not art having retained for her service in age the black tresses which had been becoming in youth, I strove to overcome the disadvantageous impression which these ill-assorted attributes had made upon me. She was certainly very small in comparison with her daughter, who was tall and as pliant as a young osier twig; and this disparity in their proportions, together with some little peculiarities in the temper of the ladies, had given occasion to a facetious courtier of Bobadil the Bee-king, whose own wits were all but addled with the heaviness of his patron, to say that she "put him in mind of an ant that had sat upon a hornet's egg."

When Zobeide had done with her housewifely cares, and was ready to listen to the questions with which Sundew was plying her, she became all interest and attention in her turn, repeatedly throwing up her hands, and uttering ejaculations of consternation and surprise; notwithstanding all which demonstrations, I am afraid she had very little real sympathy in that impending misfortune to the fair Nöria of which she at once confirmed her daughter's apprehensions, but regarded it rather as a pleasant piece of scandal

which had been thrown on the market just as it was getting flat. She offered, however, not the slightest opposition to Sundew's suggestion that she should proceed at once to Nöria's mother, and acquaint her with what had transpired more fully than her daughter might find courage to do; and Sundew, feeling a little fluttered and out of spirits at what had happened, and uneasy concerning what was to follow, was glad to keep her loquacious parent company, for a portion of the way.

In the course of their progress, they had to pass by the summer residence of Bobadil, and Zobeide, whose talkativeness and lively spirits made her something of a favourite with this distinguished individual, paused for a moment to exchange a bustling greeting, in return for the yawning recognition she received. Having uttered the salutations proper to meeting, and parting, almost in the same breath, Zobeide was hurrying on, when she found the impulse to impart to Bobadil the nature of the service on which she was bent, too strong for her, and returned, but refused to enter into any arrangement for remaining, declaring that "when not sitting she was flitting." In the meanwhile, however, she found ample time to confide to the late suitor of Nöria all that she had just heard concerning the indiscreet conduct of that unhappy little maiden; and although the facts as she had ga-

thered them were sufficiently meagre, they had by this time received amplifications, and been made the subject of inferences, in the busy laboratory of the lady's understanding, which enabled her to present them in a very acceptable form for the delectation of her phlegmatic auditor. Bobadil, who it might have been thought by Zobeide, would feel himself nearly concerned in her relation, heard it, as he did most things, completely unmoved. The grand old world airs of Nöria's mother had made an impression on him not soon to be forgotten, and above all things never to be renewed. For one disagreeable moment of his life, he had dropped down from the pedestal on which he placed himself to receive the homage of the world; but no sooner had he picked himself up and reinstated himself, than he resolved never again to venture into the presence in which this mischance had occurred, or to entertain, on any terms, that matrimonial negotiation which the stately old lady had failed to conclude at the time. He took to the story very kindly as an idle piece of gossip, which he embraced the opportunity of letting Zobeide know, in no way concerned himself; and having received this testimony - which some secret projects of her own rendered very satisfactory to her feelings, — the little body tore herself away, to hurry breathless after a friend who was pre-

ceding her in the direction she had to take, and to whom she doubted not her ability to make the narration equally acceptable as it had ~~been~~ to Bobadil.

When Sundew had followed her mother into the abode of the Bee-king, she had replied to his Pasha-like wave of the hand with an almost imperceptible inclination of the head, from which she recovered her former erect position with a saucy toss, as she passed on to busy herself in examining his belongings, intending to let him know that she found them greatly more interesting than their possessor. She caught his fish, and letting all the water drain away from them, amused herself with their gasping struggles; she entrapped the enwary little flies, and held their feet while they flapped their useless wings, or as an agreeable variation of the entertainment, suffered them to release a leg at a time, which, in order to secure a purchase for future endeavours, always equally promising, equally vain,—they never failed to plant again upon the fatal hold, from which they had freed it but a moment before. All the wanton mischief of her nature, appeared to be running riot at this time, and it was a fortunate moment for the flies and fishes, though an ill one for Bobadil, when the sudden cessation of Zobcide's glib tongue, caused her daughter to surmise that she had gone upon her way, and induced to return to her host in quest of her.

Willy-nilly was looking as wicked and dangerous as the indulgence of her naughty propensities could not fail to make her, when she presented herself before the Bee-king; and appeared half proud, and half shy, as she glanced at the many additional objects which she had taken as tribute from the things she had tormented, and strung about her person.

At this juncture Zobeide had almost overtaken the friend whose apparition had led to her abrupt departure, and Sundew was therefore left alone with Bobadil, without her mother's, not, it must be admitted, very watchful protection. She uttered a little scream when she saw the position of affairs, but did not appear much surprised or annoyed notwithstanding.

"Little madam Zobeide is gone, Sundew," observed Bobadil, with the ill-breeding for which he was remarkable; "are you afraid to be left here with me?"

"With you?" repeated Willy-nilly, as if she would have withered the very idea, if scorn could have done it, "no! you are too old for any one to be afraid of."

"Too old?" said the Bee-king reddening, or rather becoming dusky, with anger, "for what age do you take me, mistress Willy-nilly?"

"Impossible to say," replied the provoking sprite, as she dropped down by his side apparently

'quite overcome by the problem; "I can never guess people's hours after thirty-six,—at that time they just double my own, and I should think nothing further ought to be expected of me with regard to them."

Sundew had often been very kind to Bobadil when dazzled, as we have seen, by his wide-spread reputation; but he never felt so much for her as he did at this moment, when he looked at her with eyes from which the mist had fallen, thought her the finest flower he had ever seen—and hated her. He would have given half that he possessed for something very pungent, very withering and over-awing to say to this handsome minx, so impertinently young; but as nothing which could be rendered articulately would come to his aid, he was obliged to content himself with humming, or I should rather say whistling, a fragment of a tune, in a manner which reflected as little credit on his musical taste as his politeness, with stretching and crossing his legs, throwing himself back nearly at full length in his boat, taking an observation of the sun with a view to determining the time of day, and performing divers other pieces of pantomime, not less eminently calculated to remind her of the very superior spirit, and fine gentleman that he was.

Willy-nilly put her hands to her ears.

"Do stop, I beseech you," she cried laughing, "or we shall have all the frogs on the lake

coming hither to fraternise with us. I will pass over the ungraciousness of whistling, or whatever you may call it, at all in my presence, though I should have thought some of your more accomplished friends might have taught you it was not exactly the fittest entertainment for a lady;—whistle an it please you until you be breathless,—you are looking quite apoplectic already,—only don't wander off into a major key*, I never could endure it,—and at the first flat note I am gone!”

“So the creatures who wait upon, and gather up my nods, might have taught me a better way to conduct myself?” retorted Bobadil, who almost blinded with rage, was more really awake than he had found himself for many a day; “I remember the time when you, my lady Willy-nilly, did not think it beneath your pretensions to be polite!”

Sundew said that she had not in the least changed her opinion in this respect,—that she thought politeness was becoming in the greatest, as it conferred a charm on the humblest of flowers,—“but,” continued she, “your music would really make me nervous. *Excusez monsieur,—place aux dames.*”

* It has been frequently remarked that the music of nature,—the song of birds, the murmurs of a brook, the voices of the winds and the waves,—is all in the minor key.

I cannot truly say that she uttered the last words in French, — I believe indeed she gave them in that soft vernacular of her own, which was intelligible to me at the time, but I know that it was with an accent of careless impertinence, which would be left unsuggested in English. As she pronounced them she stretched out two fairy feet, and placing them on the edge of Bobadil's flower, where his own ungainly extremities were reposing themselves, drew it towards her with a petulant movement, and looked even more completely at her ease than before. As, though arch and mischievous, there was nothing which could be called forbidding in her aspect, the Bee-king began to recover his temper, and with the unusual glow of animation which had followed its loss, to feel amused at the spirit, and courage, with which she ventured to play with so great a vegetable as himself.

"A fine danee you must lead those foplings," he said chuckling, — "those foplings who will follow wherever you lead, and sigh and whine till you have thrown them a saucy word. But too bad, ho! ho! too bad, too bad, — I am afraid you are a wicked deceiver!"

"Ah! you lords of the lake," rejoined Sundew, shrugging her shoulders, "you would deny us poor maidens, who have no means of making a choice, the privilege even of *selection*! If it were

permitted to us — as it is not — to turn our eyes round, and fixing them on the best and bravest, to walk straight up to him and ticket him as the happy flower, there would be no need of all the little crooked devices upon which, in the present state of affairs, we are thrown back. Listen to me, Bobadil; see here, — a scion of some one of our numerous families of the lake passes this way, he sees that I am — that I am not — spare my modesty! — that I am in fact what you behold; — he gets an introduction to my mother perhaps, and pays his court to me. He speaks on indifferent subjects, and I hear that he has a voice like a cuckoo in June! I hope that the impression may wear off by and by, and resolve to give him the benefit of time. “If called upon to supply an answer at the moment, verbal or inductive, that answer must be ‘No!’ but I think he would wish to be allowed to stand his trial, and I examine his case with all the interest it merits, and the candour of a judge who would not be sorry to give the verdict in his favour. Is it not, thus far, all as it should be? Can anything be more fair — more kind?”

“Excellent!” cried Bobadil, almost clapping his hands in his glee, “go on, — it is better to hear you than to drink green tea!”

“He talks of love,” pursued Sundew, not heeding the compliment, “and I find that his voice sounds

more broken than before; I am sorry for him, but my decision is made, — I cannot buy his happiness with my own. I keep the evil sentence from him as long as I am able, — I smile and sigh and am as good to him as before; and again I ask of you, what were it possible for me to do more?"

Sundew was as grave in all this as if she had really been the judge to which she had likened herself, but Bobadil persisted in taking her words as the best joke he had ever heard, and was laughing until the tears ran down his cheeks.

"While hesitating to dismiss this unlucky candidate," continued Sundew, still unmoved, "another one appears on the scene. He is as little my ~~choice~~ as the first, — but chance and not choice presides in these matters. He has lint white hair, which stands off from his head like the crown of a dandelion, and his eyes, which are equally given to radiate in opposite directions, are tinged with the colour which should have settled in his cheeks and lips. He strongly reminds me of a white mouse, and when I tell my mother so, she says that he has a fine character for picking up the crumbs, which would be necessary for our future housekeeping. It is wrong to be the slave of appearances, — I am a dutiful daughter, and of an open and unreserved disposition. I talk with him, dance with him, and allow him the benefit of the same opportunities as the other; but the

twist in his eyes is intermittent, — it comes and goes, and strikes me at each time of its reappearance with fresh disgust, — it is generally worst at the moments when he is most desirous of pleasing: — his failure is more signal than that of his rival. I could multiply examples without end, but the two I have given will suffice. Is it my fault that the one has failed to render me insensible to his cracked voice, and the other to his crooked eyes?"

"Unquestionably not!" cried Bobadil in high glee, "vain fops and fools they are all of them. But does it never happen that there turns up one among all your admirers without such disqualifying attributes as you describe? I am afraid, mistress Willy-nilly, that though doubtless very merciful, you may be a trifle too difficult to please. Did you never chance to turn your eyes round, — as you say that young maidens are forbidden to do, — and find that they lighted upon something to your taste? Come now, speak out, never mind confessing to me that you have looked a little high!" and Bobadil chuckled, and settled himself into his fine clothes with a waggish air.

"I might certainly make such a confession to you better than to many a one," replied Sundew, "it is so easy to speak freely with one of your years, — but as I want no absolution, being sensible of no wrong, I may as well keep my secrets

to myself. What I do not object to telling you, however, is the reason that I *may* be a little difficult to please. It is,—it is,” pursued the arch coquette, flashing upon him a fiery glance, “that I feel within myself that I could love! not as the passive creatures who accept with resignation the first hand that is held out to them, but as natures like mine, gay, and free, and a little bit wild if you will, *do* love when they once set their hearts to it! I am proud and wilful, I can see the lake at my feet and spurn it, but the hero of my heart would be my God and his love my heaven! I could exist and feel well all my days, in a heat which to another would be death; what would be fever in the dull existences about me, would be but the glow of health to me, the strong and natural action of the pulses of my quick young life! I could lie down lowly, yes lowly, at his feet, and arise flashing my scorn on others, to avenge the subjugation of my spirit. I am a Salamander among flowers,—I can live in the eye of the sun unconsumed, I can breathe in burning flame! Let him follow me there who is worthy of the glorious element!”

She started to her feet, her wild words were resonant with a wilder earnestness, she looked at him as if she would have probed his heart, and stood for a moment in the attitude of a champion who has thrown down his gauntlet at the foot of

his foe. Before Bobadil could recover from the bewildering excitement into which her mad sally had plunged him, she waved her hand to silence the words which were struggling to his lips, and floated from his presence with the swiftness of light.

Was it true that there came to my ear at intervals, the sound of a silvery laugh? And if it were so, did it proceed from that observant party of knats which curled about Bobadil's head, or from Sundew, who, in the pauses of her at first so precipitate career, strung upon her fantastic scarf the few tawny little feathers she had stolen from his wing? However this might be, there is one thing certain,—Bobadil the Bee-king had no need of green tea—or whatever may be the substitute for that stimulant in Flower-land,—to keep him awake that day.

In the meantime, madam Zobeide had been pursuing her way to the fulfilment of her friendly errand, but had met with many interruptions in the shape of encounters with her acquaintance, all willing to hear to the end the story of Neria's misadventure. The old lady of Valisneria, as has already been shown, was not much of a favourite with the good people of the lake, and Zobeide in particular might be excused for feeling some satisfaction in dwelling upon the indiscretion of this proud old lady's offspring, as it afforded

her an opportunity of congratulating herself in the hearing of her friends, upon the satisfaction which resulted to her from the method she had employed in the rearing of her own. Just as she was on the point of bidding farewell to one of her gossips, and was declaring for the twentieth time, that so many things had come across her on her way to the widow of Valisneria, that she feared her visit would never be made, her words received a speedy confirmation in the appearance of the object of their discourse, who having concluded the arrangement which was to have provided an asylum for her unhappy child, was just now taking her way to the abode of Zobeide, there to seek Sundew, whom she had promised to send to bear Neria company. The mission of each being quickly explained to the other, the two parents took their way together to the quarter where Zobeide resided. They found Sundew at home as they had hoped, and expressing her willingness to oblige the mother, or be in any way useful to her sweet little friend, she joined the elder spirits without delay, and the trio proceeded to the spot where it was known that Neria was wont to beguile the hours. Sundew was the first to express her astonishment, when, looking for her while yet at a distance, she saw no traces of the little fairy vessel, which had floated on the waters in this place, since the time of its first appearance. Zo-

beide next became loud in her surprise, as they neared the spot, and turned and peered in every direction in search of the missing flower. The stern lady of Valisneria as yet said nothing, but cast vigilant glances all around her, and thought perhaps that the poor little spirit was concealing herself from her presence in fear: but time soon showed her the error of the supposition. Zobeide performed prodigies in hunting for the lost one; not a thing visible to the naked eye could have escaped her researches, while at each ill-success her lamentations became louder and louder. A stranger who had heard only her accents of despair and watched her excited movements, would unhesitatingly have pronounced her to be the chief sufferer; but Sundew, who knew her mother very well, was touched, all wanton and cruel as she was, by the dignified sorrow which was evident in the parent of her lost friend, and stood ever near her, to support her failing movements with her young strength. While a hope remained, the search was not abandoned, and even when all was lost, Zobeide with indomitable courage and activity, was preparing to go through the whole course of her operations again, when the lady of Valisneria stopped her.

“Let us go to our homes,” said she in her low, calm, tones: “you two to take comfort in the thought of the friendly aid you have rendered me

in my need, and I to mourn the dead. The finger of the Most High is in everything we see. — His wisdom rules over us small and great, — she was taken from the evil to come.” The lady bowed her head, and even Sundew and Zobeide joined in the mute reverence; the trio moved silently away to the desolate dwelling of the Valisneria, and the mother and daughter quitted the last frail scion of the old house upon the threshold, with full hearts, but without a word.

“How she mourns for her child!” said the neighbours as they watched her sitting alone in the dreary courts of her all but extinguished race, and marked the unchanging attitude into which she seemed to have been frozen, stiff and rigid by her despair. And she did mourn, with a sorrow which found its only hope in the grave which was unclosing before her; but the later grief had only swollen the gloomy channel of the elder, and she murmured ever to herself, as she sat there alone with her woe, “When shall I come to thee, husband of a few fond hours? — thou who wentest down to the grave in thy bright youth, — when shall I see thee? when shall I be at rest.” A little while still and the query of her heart found an answer; her faded form had vanished from its accustomed place, and the old widow of a youthful bridegroom had departed, to sleep in peace, or to wake in joy by his side.

Very soon after the widow had gone to her rest, the season of those fêtes to which Sundew had alluded in her conversation with Nöria, drew on. The silence of desolation in one house, the flutter of dawning expectation, and the movement of young life, in another, — the two separated in space only by a party wall, in feeling by all that intervenes between the poles, — such are contemplations dear to a moralist, and familiar to every one who looks abroad in the world. The lake was in this, as in much else that I observed, but a microcosm of that wider sphere in which we ourselves have to perform our parts.

The hopes at which I have hinted, stirred in the maternal breast of Zobeide. She had marked the sudden, though still very fluctuating intimacy, which had sprung up between her daughter and Bobadil; marked it with pride and exultation, and was frequently heard to declare, in moments when her ideas had been supposed to be in more active co-operation with her busy hands, that “it would be Sundew’s own fault, for playing a losing game, if she were not mated before long with the richest bridegroom betwixt the four borders of the lake!” To convince this good lady and anxious parent, that Willy-nilly never thought about any set game at all, but only played off her own mischievous airs as suited her prankish humour, would have been impossible; she felt

often at a loss when endeavouring to follow out her manœuvres, but never doubted that their immediate object was the conquest of Bobadil, and endowment of herself with his name and estate. Now regarding this as her ultimate object, she might certainly be within sight of the truth, but Sundew's was one of those natures that find so keen a pleasure in the pursuit of her aims, that she was never in a hurry to bring down her quarry, and shorten her gratification by finishing the sport. She kept him wide awake during the whole winter season ; brought him a score of times to the point of a declaration, but departed, or called in the aid of others, before he had uttered a word. She made him now believe that he was her idol, and anon her scorn, and there was a witchery, an airiness, and lively grace about everything she did, that often made her, to a being of the Bee-king's lymphatic temperament, the most irresistible, when her humours were the hardest to bear with.

Nor yet must it be wholly believed that Sundew was the only one of the two who was wayward and changeable : Bobadil was so also in an eminent degree. He did not resign the ascendancy over himself without many a struggle to recall it, and often visited the wounds which she inflicted on his self-love, with a dogged resentment which even she found it difficult to appease.

His pride too received many an indemnification in the boasts he indulged in to his friends, of his power over this wild creature, whose freaks he affected to encourage as affording him a lively entertainment. Whenever she had vexed or mortified him more than her wont, he vowed that he "must marry her outright, in order to terminate a sport that was beginning at length to fatigue him." Sometimes, however, he was less magnanimous on such occasions, and declared his intention of withdrawing from the whole affair while he could hope that an outlet might be left to him; upon which avowal he generally became exceedingly morose, and she in her turn had to affect a touching penitence, or, as was more commonly the case, to strike out some new, startling, and still more oppressive tactic, in order to recall him to his allegiance.

It was thought by the lookers on at this strange courtship, — at least by those who, less vitally interested in the result, were less likely to be mislead than the thrifty Zobeide, — that the pair were so equally matched as to make it more than doubtful if the affair would come to an end in the term of their natural lives. It was calculated that neither party would be able henceforward to exist without the excitement of alternately beleaguering, and fleeing before the face of the other; for the *prestige* that surrounded the

name of Bobadil, caused him to be considered on all sides, as the equal of his brilliant tormentor.

In a school of philosophy, or I rather should say of casuistry, less popular in our own day than in the good old time before us, a favourite problem, was the hypothetical case of a donkey standing between two racks of hay, of precisely equal size, and odoriferous attractions. It was asked by the wise heads, as a subject well worthy of all the learning and abstract reasoning which could be brought to bear upon it, whether that donkey, thus cruelly tantalised, would ever be capable of yielding to either of the temptations so equally poised? As the question was never solved in its original form, I may be pardoned by my friends for presenting it to them in that new one in which it appeared to the fairy folk with whom we have to do, and asking, if the desire to be caught, and the desire to flee, so exactly balanced in the mind of Sundew, is ever likely to lead to any result? In case, however, there be any who find themselves unequal to the solution of this modification of the problem, I can come to their aid with the assurance that the course of events will set the latter question at rest, while the former expired in the midst of its agitation.

And Sundew danced, and chattered and teased, and coquetted, and was declared on all hands to

be more sparkling and wicked than she had ever been before. She had grieved in sincerity,—for she was a generous and self-confident rival,—over the untimely fate of Neria, whom she had hoped at this time to be amusing herself with, and patronising, as a neophyte in that world of busy idleness in which she found herself so entirely at home. At first she had arrayed herself in a few becoming little tokens of mourning for the lovely departed, but finding them a restraint upon the returning gaiety of her mood, she laid them quickly aside; and sudden strokes of calamity being, as I have before had occasion to remark, of frequent occurrence on the lake, the impression which this particular one had made upon Sundew and her circle, was only equal to that produced by some nine days' wonder in this world of our own; and the hum of joyous voices, the trampling of dancing feet, the laughter, the contention, the merry strains of music, the songs, and flapping of applauding wings which followed them, were often at their loudest, close by that quiet spot where the vast folds of the chestnut leaf rose as a monument, marking the place where the flower-spirit had disappeared.

It may justly be inferred that a more solicitous and hopeful affection than any which in her short career she had been able to draw around her, would have refused so ready a belief in her death, and

have hovered still about the mighty fabric which had blotted out her dwelling, with a vague expectation of seeing her again, which the sense of powerlessness to aid in its fulfilment would have been all inadequate to crush. As it was, her memory had passed from before them with her visible presence, leaving quite unlearnt the lesson it might have taught, since none reflected that the fate which had been hers, and others equally unforeseen, which were of perpetual recurrence, might shortly become their own.

CHAP. VIII.

“ My soul is like a wide and empty fane, —
 Sit thou in it like a God, O maid divine !
 With worship and religion 't will be fill'd.
 My soul is empty, lorn, and hungry space, —
 Leap thou into it like a new-born star.”

Alexander Smith.

ALL this while the mingled cadence of sounds to which I have adverted, did not fall upon deaf ears within that world-repelling sanctuary formed by the strong net-work and tissues of the leaf. They rose up, and, as every object of sense becomes purified by its application and uses, helped to swell the joyful holocaust which it seemed to the overflowing heart of Neria, all nature was offering to its beneficent Creator. But I am anticipating, and must return, for the fuller comprehension of my readers, to the point at which I left the sleeping Flower, when she became shrouded from all external observation, and threatened, as it seemed, with an untimely end.

The little maid had been much exhausted by her alternating emotions of extremest joy, and most hopeless sorrow, and I soon found that the sleep into which she had fallen in this collapse

and prostration of her system, had been unbroken by the descent of the leaf, and was likely to endure, as in fact it did, for long after the period at which that event had occurred. As I watched her for some time with the most lively interest, not a dream seemed to disturb this deep sleep which was doing its work in recruiting the spent powers of her nature, alas! as I then thought, to no further end than to fit her for experiencing, in a more poignant degree, all the gloom and terror of the situation to which she would awake.

The burning heat of the afternoon subsided, and the air became more temperate as the sun declined. It was the only warning I possessed of the flight of time, as I sat there and watched for the first indication of suffering, or change, upon the face of the lovely sleeper. By degrees I thought that her repose became less deep; she often smiled, and at last even moved her lips, and seemed to murmur words, pausing from time to time as if listening to a reply, and then resuming her whispered speech as before. By and by she clasped her arms, and then, as if the involuntary movement had awakened her, rose up straight from her couch, and casting her eyes all around in the hope of detecting some shape she had beheld in sleep, looked, with the abstracted gaze of one who dreams still in waking, into the partial obscurity which encompassed her. She continued

thus for some moments, too much absorbed in her own happy delusions, to mark the changed aspect of all which met her view.

When Nürä started* from her reverie to her actual sorrow, and that new dispensation of her lot which must force her henceforth to endure it in darkness and alone, her amazement and helpless terror must have melted a heart of stone. She called and screamed as well as her fear would allow her, but the choked sounds only resounded through the vaulted dome of her prison, and came back to mock her in dismal echoes. She hurled her frail strength against its walls, in the hope of battering them down;—all in vain were her efforts, its sides stood as firm beneath the light shock, as a hat against the motion of the feather which adorns it. She sought for some outlet at which she might present herself, and cry if perchance there were any within hearing. She found a few small fractures through which she forced the end of her scarf, and waved it as a signal to attract notice from without, but all to no effect. The time when her mother, Zobeide, and Sundew, had instituted their vigilant search for her, was already long passed, and the trio had now divided and gone far away, — one bent on business, the other on pleasure, and the third shut up in her lonely grief; all equally and however occupied, lost to her, as she was separated from them. She

could easily have plunged into the shadowy water, and have dived beneath the foundations of her prison house ; but a mysterious power of which she was fully cognisant, made it impossible for her to leave her charge behind her, cut off from her watchfulness and care, and bound up its fate irretrievably with her own.

After some time, when the first shock of her alarm had passed over, and she found all her endeavours at opening a communication with the world beyond her, unavailing, Neria threw herself down, and began to familiarise herself with her lot. Her eyes became accustomed by degrees to the comparative obscurity, and she set herself to observe the nature of the structure which seemed to have fallen down upon her from the clouds, to shut out the sun and the light which were so precious to her. This structure in itself was not wanting in beauty, and had a wonderful intricacy of arrangement ; but the poor little maiden who sat there so solitary beneath it, began to think of her beautiful sky, and of all the free and wondrous things which passed across it, and looking up still at the dark dome, without hiding the sorrow, there was no one at hand to remark, made the most pitiful little face that imagination could conceive, as she wept in the bitterness of her despair. Her tears gave some ease to her heart, and having allowed them free course

for a time, she resigned herself to her fate, and arming herself with strength in the thought of that more touching sorrow, which had preceded this last shock to her feelings, she felt prepared to meet with resignation, if not indeed with thankfulness, the worst that could befall her from this new and terrific source. She became the subject of this passive state of feeling the more readily, as she indulged a hope, — not wholly without confirmation in the growing languor and weakness which oppressed her, — that the state of being thus cut off from the genial external influences that were natural to her, would shortly bring about her release from every woe, through a mysterious agency of which she was vaguely conscious.

But with this thought of silence and death, from which the little spirit had drawn comfort at first, there came in time a terror peculiar to itself. She was so alone, so unsupported, — there was no one to cheer her sinking spirit on the dark threshold, or to weep for her when she had passed beyond it. Should she meet him, the living? or would her new state separate her even more widely from him than at present, when they both drew the same elements of life through the same natural organs, though inhabitants alas! of different spheres. All was vague and indistinct

to her preceptions, for her intuition failed her wholly when placed as now, in circumstances whence she was no longer capable of acting for herself, but became the passive tool of an inscrutable will.

Amidst the chaos and confusion of Néria's ideas, one feeling made to itself a shape and a voice, and dominated all the rest. She must see him again,—she must bid him the final farewell, and communicate to him, in one look of fond agony, that final that farewell was to be. Might but the tie which bound her to life break then in that struggle between transport and despair! The cautions of her mother were forgotten in that moment, or triumphantly set at nought, as useless in the new aspect of her case. Who was there to participate in the mysterious sorrow which she would bring on herself? Who would even know of it? What mattered for herself a single pang the more? Would not the grave still it as it would still the rest? How could she implicate *him* in her fate?—her fate was to die,—could the last look of her loving eyes, bearing with it unutterable blessing, bring him aught but good? And then after all, this sorrow,—might it not already have fallen upon her,—might she not have received the punishment of her wilfulness, when that gloomy canopy descended upon her head? This last reflection set all the others at

rest: her mother was right, thought Néria; she had been punished as she had deserved, and would now bid adieu to the life she had forfeited, and to him who had called up ideas in her heart which had made all its realities undesirable.

She knelt down trembling by the side of her flower, while an unspeakable awe overcame her. The sun was fast setting, and its rosy light streamed through the apertures in the roof of the dome, and penetrated the innumerable, though all but invisible, perforations of its surface. The rays borrowing, as they filtered through, another tint from the amber of the leaf, presented to the eyes of Néria, now accustomed to the obscure light, a subdued glory, which added to the solemnity of what she believed to be her approaching end.

For a moment the fair and innocent creature knelt there motionless, while her thoughts swept into one retrospective glance, the few and simple incidents of her life. Her mother and Sundew were not forgotten; she wafted them a silent farewell. She had "set her house in order," and now she was ready to depart; she would die looking upon him;—in this contemplation even death must lose its terrors, and she would be supported by a sublime enthusiasm, believing herself the martyr of her love. She bent over the flowery vessel, her glance shot down through

the clear water,—she looked upon *him*. That was not death which brightened in the glance of the Flower-spirit,—it was life,—all that is known of life the most intense,—of life so generous and exuberant that it might be imagined capable of kindling into animation any object upon which it had thus rested. The palpitating existence which met the gaze of Nēria had no need of such an impulse from without. She smiled a heavenly smile, which in nothing banished the sweet awe from her features; then she was grave, and then she smiled again: the change passed over her face as rapidly, silently, and unconsciously as lights and shadows from the clouds chase each other over a landscape. Presently she arose in haste and trepidation; a wild, but as yet only half-accredited joy was painted in her face; she retreated to the farthest verge of her vessel; she raised her clasped hands not daring to look before her, her breath was audible, struggling up to her lips through the tumult of her soul.

There might be heard at this moment a rushing sound, as of something cleaving the water; the sound became nearer and louder; she heard it, but had not courage to turn her eyes. In a moment more the waters were divided as a beautiful shape rose above them, and Nēria opening her arms with a blind impulse, was received into the embrace of her beloved.

The ecstasy of a moment such as this can never find expression in words. To say that all her sorrow, fear, languor, weakness, and threatenings of evil, were forgotten on the instant as if they had never been, or, if acknowledged at all, were felt in the distance as grotesque and fanciful shapes into which some deadly vapour was vanishing, would be only to recapitulate that of which the inborn perception of all who will look upon this page, would suffice to assure them without my aid. We will therefore leave these two beings to their first rapturous delight in each others' companionship, while I attempt in the meanwhile a faint description of those perfections, which had stamped themselves with so indelible an impression upon the vivid soul of Neria.

The lover of that now most supremely happy little flower, was a tall youth, at least he looked so by her side, — but the delicate mould, and faultless symmetry of his limbs, might have given them an appearance of too high finish, if not of effeminacy, to be consistent with masculine beauty, were it not for the rich hue which pervaded them, and for the prompt, assured, and steady movements, which impressed the beholder with an idea of energy and strength, through a medium far more refined than that by which it is commonly conveyed. His large eyes,

of a colour difficult accurately to define, were fitted for the expression of every feeling in its extreme, from passionate ire to passionate adoration, with every intermediate shade however subtle, when such could find a place in his highly attuned nature. His hair was waving, and its golden brown colour, stirred up in my mind a dear association; the habitual character of the delicate physiognomy was bold,—it might be something defiant,—and the shadowy markings of unawakened passions were already deeply traced upon his lip and brow. This combination of attributes when thus enumerated may sound forbidding, but manifested in the young and ardent spirit who had burst through the watery barrier at the summons of a tender look, all that was severe in them was so attractively blended with all that was most gentle, that it communicated a charm and zest to his features and personal bearing, which other hearts less sensitive than that of Neria might have acknowledged with pleasure. He wore a tunic not unlike her own, but a simple girdle supplied the place of her many folded scarf, and confining the limp drapery of the tunic about his waist, suffered the just development of his limbs, and masculine character of his attitudes, to make their due impression.

The sun had now made still further advances

on his journey to the west, and his beams were still more rosy than when Neria had believed herself to be looking upon their veiled glory for the last time. She sat now with her lover beneath the same shade which but a short while before she had looked upon as a hateful prison, and marvelled at the beauty of everything which met her gaze. The arched and groined roof rising like that of a gothic church, drew her soul upwards in grateful praises to that heaven, whose visible firmament she no longer regretted. She breathed freely and fully : what could she want with wider space ? was not that dome, which protected them from the idle gaze of the curious, and unsympathetic, large enough, since it enclosed all that was most dear to them ? She saw now all of beauty that belonged to it, and invested it, besides, with a thousand attractions which had no existence out of a loving fancy. The confined space became so filled with the varied motions of her love and joy, that it even took from them a something of mystery and depth, and she regarded the recesses made by the convolutions of the leaf, as places to be explored on some future occasion in company with her beloved, and looked at, and admired as rare and wonderful, by a light brighter than that of the sun.

But she had no time to spare for these things

at present;—she must look at him, whose presence among them it was, which caused them all to become suddenly invested with such glorious beauty,—hear from his lips, already for the hundredth time, the sweet words which proclaimed him her own, and question him of all which had befallen him before they came together,—of his birth, his parentage, his brethren, and sisters,—all that had, or could have, an influence upon his life, or which, by establishing his connexion with ordinary mortals, should make his existence seem more real to herself.

Then she had her own little story to tell, and her lover looked grave for the first time when he heard it; but the passing cloud was banished in a moment; they were so young, so blest, so hopeful, so loving,—what presage of evil could gain upon hearts so armed?

The gratitude of Neria to her generous beloved knew no bounds. How much he must have forsaken for her! She estimated his sacrifice as immense without knowing in what it had consisted, and resolved to dedicate to him every impulse of her life, as a trifling, and most inadequate return. But when she heard that he had brothers and sisters who had loved him dearly, down below in the lake, she was unable to restrain her tears, which falling over her blooming little cheeks like dew, he kissed away like the sun.

“And for me, Valis,” she said,—for she knew his name through the same faculty by which she had divined her own,—“for me, unworthy that I am, you have separated yourself from them all? Shall you never regret it? Shall I be able to make up to you for all that you have lost? If you should leave me now, it would kill me; Valis,—but to see you unhappy would be worse than death.” Valis put back her bright head and gazed into her eyes; he knew that his own had an eloquent answer; so he said nothing, but looked at her in silence. The sensations of Neria were too intense; she could not support that fervid gaze, and her white lids drooped over her eyes, and shaded them as they would have done from too bright a light.

“Are you happy, Neria?” whispered Valis: “*shall* you be happy for ever here with me?” she tried to answer him as he had answered her, but her blushing face fell again upon his shoulder.

“Will *you* never sigh for the scenes from which you are banished?” he continued more earnestly than before; “will your sphere never appear too confined? While there is light in heaven a ray of it will steal through yonder crevice, and falling upon *this* bright head will cling to it as a glory, that *will* be light enough for me, my Neria, but for *thee*,—where is light to come from for thee?”

It was true that one single shaft of the waning sunlight found its way through the opening in the roof of their dwelling, and catching the golden locks of the happy Flower-spirit, was reflected from off them in a thousand starry beams which sent their soft radiance through the place. Neria looked up in smiling reproach, and placing a hand on both their hearts, "From here," she said; "and from here,—where else, my Valis, should it come from? It will shine by night as well as by day, and has nothing to do with the sun."

"But you are enclosed in this place as in prison," pursued Valis, — "you, who yonder might have subjects at will, are confined here a captive and a slave."•

"I am so safe and so happy," cried the little wife gleefully, "and then I do not care to be free! Besides, this is not a prison but a stronghold,—a stronghold and castle of love. Now, love you must know is a very great king, having enemies and rivals as great kings have, so is it not right that his bowers should be strongholds? Oh you darling beautiful Valis! you are come from such an out-of-the-world place, you have not seen anything like so much of life as I have; and there is no one but me to put you in the way of it all; oh I shall not have an idle time of it,—I shall have so many things to teach you!"

"And I at least one thing to teach you, in

your duty towards your wedded mate, and liege lord!" cried Valis. She was ready to die with laughing when he said this: I believe she thought it the merriest thing in the world, that idea of *duty* prompting her acts towards him, she would have served to the death for love. But her opinions as to what was becoming her on this point, were not so exact as to prevent her closing up his mouth with her hand, and insisting, in spite of his remonstrance, on tossing about his hair into twenty different arrangements, in each of which she declared he looked more completely captivating than the last.

My readers may perhaps feel surprised that I speak of the pair as already married: but married they were, united by cords as indissoluble as ever were twined, from the moment in which the free right hand had ratified the choice of their awakened hearts. There was no need of books or of priests in Flower-land, where the lot of two hearts once drawn, was determined for life or for death.

When they had been as happy and foolish, and tender, and uninteresting, to any but themselves, for a time as it was possible to be, they began to calm down a little, and to listen quietly, but with a flood of grateful feeling, to the sweet voices of the winds as they vibrated through the interstices of the leaf, and made such harmonies to their de-

licate perceptions of sound, as formed a fitting accompaniment to the epithalamium of their primitive hymen.

Deeper and deeper waxed the shades of evening, but still like a star glimmering through the twilight shone the golden hair which was parted over Neria's brow. The happy pair pressed closer together,—they loved the darkness which closing up an avenue of the external sense, surrendered them more completely to each other. Then also the approach of night was so solemn; the air felt so rarified and so pure, and the thought ascended through it so freely to those wondrous worlds, hung out in space like lamps, to light the faltering soul upon its way towards the Infinite. One of these far-off lights sent a trembling beam through the opening of the dome which enclosed the lovers, and as they looked up to it, and then turned their already familiar faces to each other, they felt that they were not left solely to the might of their mutual love, but that a Power was above it, as above them, which was so great that it could care for the humblest!

They were beautiful these glad hours of darkness, that they passed alone, every feeling of their hearts in accord with the grateful hymn which rose up on every side of them; their love a religion, their religion love.

It was now that Valis told her softly and be-

tween whiles, much of what had formed the occupation of his life, and constituted the associations which had surrounded it, up to the time at which they had met. She heard with delight that they were akin to each other, he being also a scion of the old stock, and listened with yet greater contentment when he painted to her, in glowing colours, the effect which her apparition above the water had produced upon him, rousing him from the tranquil and aimless happiness of his then existence, to the yearning for a life replete and consummated, as that which they now enjoyed. He passed lightly over some struggles which had had place in his breast, and been prolonged by the importunate interference of others, and came to the time when the latest vision of her lovely face, as it had looked down upon him through her tears, had made him burst through the restraints which had been imposed on him, given wings to his despair, and drawn him maddened with love and impatience, to live or to die at her side. He told her many strange and wonderful things about that house of Valisneria, to which they both belonged; or rather he told her some, and only lightly hinted at others, from which he turned the discourse before she was able to gather its full meaning, as if these were subjects not good to be discussed. Among the former things I may mention that he informed

her that she also had, in her unconscious infancy, dwelt beneath the water with the other sons and daughters of the Valisneria; that his young sisters would shortly appear as she had done; and that his brothers would remain in dull security where they were born, only until some lovely syren should beckon them, as she had beckoned him, to a life which did but need to be prolonged, to be worthy the participation of the stars. And all the while Valis thus talked, he held his newly found treasure in his arms, and followed her glance, if it did but turn from him for a moment, with an uneasy one of his own; seeming so fearful and almost incredulous of his happiness at the very instant when it most enthralled him, that I could not help believing it to be a happy circumstance which had provided a shelter, or, as Neria had termed it, a "stronghold," for so jealous a love as his.

But now came the time when the sound of merry voices, of laughter, and of dancing feet, broke in upon, or mingled with, the more solemn music which had preceded. Neria listened to sounds which she heard in combination for the first time, and calling to remembrance the words of Sundew, knew that this must be one of the winter fêtes of which she had told her when they had conversed together in the spring-time. She and Valis both held their breath—that spicy

breath which had so perfumed their bower,—as they listened to the voices and rustling movements without, and clung to each other more closely than before, as if fearing that something from the outer world might come between them and disturb their bliss. They blest the friendly walls which formed them so sweet a refuge, and continued trembling and listening, while they thrilled with delight and pride at the thought, that as they sat there enfolded in each other's arms, each held a treasure which would become the marvel and envy of the whole giddy throng, were the cover uplifted for a moment! To Neria even more than to Valis, this lover-like presumption was fraught with exquisite enjoyment. She had once appeared, and was known to the laughing throng; they believed her at this moment the victim of an untimely fate; and here she sat gladder and gayer than any of them, the unseen point around which they circled, and, wonderful to tell! the actual wife of the most richly endowed of spirits of the water or the soil! “What would they say, what could they think,—if one of the portals of the leaf, were to unfold, and reveal them suddenly in their midst?” She revelled in her delicious secret, and presented it in whispers to Valis, in which she endeavoured to set it forth in all its most striking, and happiest aspects. There was never so completely and hopelessly

bewitched, and bewitching a little wife in the world.

But being of an extremely sensitive organisation, the tenour of Neria's spirits seldom ran quite even for very long together, an effect common to individuals of her temperament, and which, as her love for her husband had awakened many chords of feeling which had partially slept before, seemed likely rather to increase than to diminish in her case.

Recognising the voice of Sundew among those which were passing to and fro before their dwelling, a momentary yearning came over her, to see and embrace her friend, and to tell her of her unforeseen happiness ; but this feeling passed away before long, and yielded its place to one still deeper, when she thought of her mother, sitting, as she doubtless would be, away from the festive throng, un comforted in a grief which was as deep and secret as her own new-born joy, and to which had been lately added the uncertainty concerning the fate of her child, or more likely the conviction of her death. As this picture rose before her, Neria was unable to restrain her tears, and Valis, in despair at her sudden sorrow, adjured her to confide to him its cause.

"My mother," sobbed Neria, "oh Valis, my mother,—I have been a forgetful and thankless child !"

"For your mother, sweet one,—are you weep-

ing for her?" said Valis with a look of concern, "you must *not* weep for her or for any one living; come dry these tears or I shall hate her for making them fall."

The little wife tried hard to do as she was bid, but the tears would come; they seemed only to come the more.

"Do you weary of my love so soon?" exclaimed Valis in a tone of sad reproach. "Oh Néria! I had hoped it would have made up to you for all! Alas! alas! I have been blind. You who are so beautiful, so glad of heart, so full of life, so made to be the day-dream of many a heart, — thus doomed to be the idol of one! It is too much that I have expected of you, I have been cruel, I have wronged you, — you could not sit here without regret. Voices from the vain world from which you are shut out, come sweeping by your prison, your dungeon, your cage, — voices you know, voices — Oh madness! You weep that you cannot be free as others, — you weep, and I would comfort you, — alas! I can only weep with you, for we both are unhappy, and I perhaps the most so!"

"I am happy!" cried Néria, as well as she could speak through her tears, "oh so happy, Valis, so, so happy!"

"You are happy," repeated Valis, "and yet choking with sobs and tears! do not deceive me,

Nëria, Nëria! My life is bound up in yours, — you might kill me with a false word. You hear them, you would fain go to them, — tell me at once, tell me truth, — I *will* have nothing less from your lips!”

“I would not leave you, I would not go to them, I would rather die here at your feet!” said Nëria, her pale cheeks wet with the tears she had ceased to shed.

“Then why do you tremble as you are trembling now, and why do you look so pitiful and so pale? Did you hear no voice that you knew, among all that were rushing past us? No no! I was not made for this. Oh wife! oh love! oh torment! I am lost. Have you nothing to say, must you sit there silent, — no single word to assure me of your love?”

“I heard only Sundew’s voice,” returned Nëria, trembling like a leaf shaken by the blast after having been scorched by the sun; — “she was my friend, but she is nothing to me now, — I shall not see her, — I do not care to see her more.”

“Come here to me, my only love,” said Valis, drawing her towards him; “I have frightened you with my hateful passion till you cannot stand alone. I love you to distraction, my Nëria, — I should turn pale if I saw but a shadow on the water, and your tears can move me till I am beside myself. I know now that it was only for

your mother that you wept, — but you must not weep, — I cannot see it. I have brothers and sisters and friends without number, — or I had when I left them for thee; — do I regret them? Do I dwell upon their memory — or bestow upon them a thought thou mightest claim as thine own? What is the love of thy mother in comparison with mine? What is her grief for the loss of thee for ever, to what mine would be if thou leftest me for a day? And has she not been stern and cruel to us both? Would she not have separated us remorselessly? Can I ever forget it? Do we not owe it to our happiness to remember it against her? Do not listen again to those hated sounds without, — they make discord of the music of our twin hearts; if you heard her voice it would but awaken you to idle recollections. Those were no sounds of lamentation that we heard; her friends are all blithe and happy enough to cheer her in case she is sad.”

“It would be in vain, Valis, that I should listen for my mother’s voice,” replied Neria; “she is far away from that careless crowd, where the echoes of their mirth sound fainter, and more distant, than they do here. She sits alone in a place where the sun does not shine by day, or the stars by night, with no beloved presence to make light out of darkness, but only some deep and unknown grief to cloud her thoughts, — a grief kept

even from her child, and alas! in those thoughtless and heedless days, not pitied by her as it should have been!"

"Poor, poor mother!" said Valis, his eyes filling with tears as those of his little wife had done but a short time before, "it is a mournful picture that you set before me. Poor sad mother bereft of her little one, her joy, and her pride! No wonder that this gentle little heart should overflow at the thought. If I could send thee to her as an angel of comfort, thou best and most beautiful! — I would do it; I know thou would'st come back to me, my Neria, — to thy dungeon and thy husband: my faith in thee is as the poles, but I am mad for thy love, have pity on and forgive me, — I am beside myself when I could wrong thee by a thought!"

Neria had pity and forgiveness, — if indeed the last could be said to exist when no shadow of resentment had gone before, — in such plentiful store, that she had not words to convey the sum of it, but lavished her caresses upon her impetuous lord in a manner sufficiently calculated to reassure him. He on his part was equally at a loss how to testify the depth and sincerity of his repentance. He knelt at her feet, — it was not enough, — he raised her, resisting as she was, to the polished plinth which rose in the centre of her flower; and prostrated himself before her, declaring himself her

slave for ever, and devoting himself to sudden destruction and the vengeance of Heaven, if he should ever again banish the smile from her lip. He denounced himself unworthy of her and her generous affection, and averred that her looks of unutterable goodness were killing him with remorse.

In a word, Valis was as extravagant and unreasonable in his endeavours at atonement, as he had been but a moment before in his wrath : but the soul of Neria's impassioned mate was a generous and a true one ; and if the pouring out of its every impulse in too wild profusion on one sweet object, had somewhat disturbed the balance of his organisation, he must not be too deeply blamed for a fault that was so little within his own control.

Neria trembled as violently at these fervid expressions of her Valis's regret, as she had done awhile before at the anger which had given rise to them, but her heart was filled nevertheless with a wild joy which she might well have accounted, had she been one to take measure of her feelings, —among the most exquisite emotions it had been her fate to experience. No words could ever convey the rapture which thrilled through every pulse of her being, at the consciousness that she was the centre of so much love. Timid, and exceedingly given to tremble as she was, she

began to think that certainly at some distant period, she might survive even another shock of her Valis's wrath, if the reconciliation which followed, it should be as complete, and passing sweet, as that which had just taken place.

Nëria had after a time been taken down from her pedestal, and she and Valis sat side by side, discoursing in earnest whispers of the bright future which lay before them, and forming a thousand simple projects which had reference only to a few short hours in advance, and which derived their sole but sufficient charm from the circumstance that they were to work them out together.

Before daylight they both fell asleep, as much needing the sweet restorative, as weary, and with eyelids as heavy, as those whose festive voices were only just hushed, and who had been passing the season of social entertainment in constant movement, excitement and activity. But Valis and Nëria, like all creatures who are deeply in love, found such a world of activity, excitement, and change within their own two hearts; a smile, a frown, a word or tone but half comprehended, was an event of such absorbing interest, that it might truly be said they found more to occupy them in their narrow cave, than many another couple would have done, who had the whole wide world in which to wander at will.

There was never a moment which hung heavy on their hands; they were merry or earnest by turns through the livelong hours, and they even snatched an instant for sleep, as those who are unwillingly paying a debt.

We will leave them now to their brief repose, and defer their awakening to another chapter.

CHAP. IX.

"Love's a chameleon that lives on meer ayre ;
And surfeits when it comes to grosser fare.
'Tis petty jealousies and little fears,
Hopes join'd with doubts, and joys with April teares,
That crown our love with pleasures."

Sir John Suckling.

THE first ray of the morning sun, glinting through the opening in the roof and the semi-transparent walls of their bower, aroused the happy spirits from their slumbers, and after having had much ado ere they succeeded in assuring themselves that their enchanted life was not all a dream, they sent up a sweet odour to heaven as a hymn of praise, and addressed themselves to the first light labours of the day.

Nëria was more busy and more heedful than ever, of the spotless appearance of all which depended on her care. She smoothed the starry petals of her flower, till there was not a fold to be seen upon it ; she removed every speck from its delicate surface, and arranged it symmetrically upon the water. She next addressed herself to duties more directly personal ; and having taken a refreshing bath in the lake, busied herself in removing the drops which clung to her robe, and

in shaking out her golden curls, which she arranged with all the simple art of which she was mistress, as she hung over her lovely image reflected back from the smooth mirror of the lake.

Having gone through these innocent mysteries of the toilet with much gravity, Néria turned smiling to her husband, on whom she was impatient to witness their effect, and found that, instead of having been occupied on his own part in similar cares, he had been seated idly in his disordered vessel, watching her varied and active evolutions. The thought that he was unable to turn his gaze from her for a moment, however sweet and welcome in itself, did not hinder Néria from feeling the propriety of having all in order about them, and in a state which the sun, when he was fully risen, might take note of with pleasure. She therefore suggested to Valis that he should set about making himself the beautiful being that nature had intended him to appear, without delay, and offered her own assistance in arranging his flower. Of course his gallantry prevented his admitting her proposal, and he addressed himself immediately, though with a languid air, to the task she had assigned him, and which withdrawing him from his enamoured contemplation of herself, he denounced as an unmitigated annoyance.

But if Valis found these necessary cares little to his taste, Neria was fated shortly to experience a sadder eclipse of her new-born happiness. That life which the little Flower-spirit possessed in connexion with her vessel, was ministered to, like our own, by the soil on which she flourished, turned into ambrosia before it reached her veins, even as the peach and the pomegranate are eliminated for ourselves. Neria, orderly and systematic by nature in spite of the ardour of her affections, never dreamed that her love was to alter the conditions of her being; and her morning duties concluded, refreshed herself with her simple repast, nothing doubting that her Valis was similarly engaged.

But when she beheld him reclining in his flower, and watching her as before with his loving smile, a vague, it might almost be said a prophetic, instinct of coming evil was unfolded in her: she flew towards him, and hiding her weeping face on his shoulder, prayed him, in words interrupted by sobs, to be more mindful of himself and the conditions by which alone he could prosper. At first he endeavoured, as he dried her tears, to laugh away the apprehensions which had given rise to them; but Neria's fond little heart, almost breaking with its timid forebodings, was not to be comforted in this way. As she still wept and clasped him in her trembling arms,

entreating and coaxing, while she offered him all manner of means of fulfilling her wishes, Valis listened seriously, and even sadly, to what she had to urge: and when she pictured to him, with an artless eloquence I will not mar by attempting to render in words, the evils which must result to them from his negligent course, a look of doubt, and even of dread, was added to the sadness of his features. But he threw off the cloud from his spirit with a prompt effort, and told her that she must rest satisfied with him as he was, nor seek to change his nature: that if his love was sufficient to his life, it ought rather to be a source of pride to its object, than one of useless re-pining: that he did not reproach her for seeking in her own case some other ministration to the existence that was so precious in his eyes,—for that to love as he did, it was necessary that the being adored, should be lovely and peerless as she was.

Valis pursued this theme for some time in a strain of such eloquent warmth, that his little wife was led to forget for the moment the mournful point from which they had departed. But this happy oblivion was of short duration; from this time forward a sense of indefinite fear, like a shadowy phantom, moved ever on the horizon of her future, and she never partook of her

solitary repasts without mixing their sweet juices with silent tears.

While the two were still communing together, the sun was rising, and tinging with his morning hues, lake, and forest, and hill-side, without their abode; and Nöria, in her momentarily recovered spirits, called the attention of her mate, and prayed him to look with her, at the increasing radiance of the sky, as they saw it through the fracture in the dome of their prison. He said he would rather choose to watch it as it brightened upon her face; and he did so, while his little wife sat before him more happy, and more proud, than a mortal queen.

First he cried out when it struck, as it had done at parting, on her hair, and ~~wade~~, as he said, another sun there, which sent its own beams over her brow. Then he watched the shadows fleeing from around her eyes, and revealing the blue depths of those twin lakes in which he declared he could lose a thousand hearts. He bade her sit quite still, while the smooth little alpine ridge of her nose became lighted by degrees in its entire length, and was seen to rise between the blooming rose-gardens of her cheeks. He had something equally fanciful and extravagant to say of everything, until he came to her smiling lips, which he vowed were never meant to be talked about, but only to be kissed, and wound

up his rhapsody in a shower of the only kind of tribute he considered it fitting to bestow on them.

But though Valis and Néria never wearied, or thought they could weary of, the follies and extremes of a first and only love, those readers who have followed me with patience thus far in my relation, will be happy to allow me to pass in silence over events, fraught with importance to these two fond spirits, but meaningless and vapid to others, which filled up the measure of their day or days, until another sun had set. Let me only premise before I have done with this period of their lives, that it was far from unchequered by shadows such as those which had already passed between them. Néria, called upon for the exercise of the courage of which she had believed herself possessed, had been more than once lifted upon her pedestal, and prayed to as a goddess by the repentant Valis, — and more than a thousand times she felt had it been needed, she could have forgiven him the wrong he had done her.

I believe indeed she had been right in saying, that she did “not care to be free,” for her slavish little heart appeared only to cling to him the more fondly, for everything he made her suffer.

It was after one of these sweet reconciliations, that they sat together as the second sun,—marking with them, it will be remembered, a much longer period of life than with us,—set upon their love. The season of summer which had not long passed, had been unusually sultry and oppressive, and now they observed, without looking up from each other, that the lightning which gleamed through the walls of their bower, was brighter, and more lurid, than was common at this season of their year. The wind also rattled among the branches overhead, with an angry motion, or gave forth short and heavy sighs as it departed to vent its uneasy petulance elsewhere. Neria nestled closer to her companion, seeking his protection from she knew not what. As the birds droop their wings, and hide in thick trees, and the insect tribes hurry to their nests, before man in his wisdom has perceived so much as a cloud in the sky, so Neria and Valis had been conscious of a strange sensation of unrest—of a feeling of vague alarm, before a single leaf had stirred in the breeze, or a flash of lightning had divided the air. And now when the disaster they had felt to be approaching was so near, Neria, as she listened to the sighing of the wind, and heard the rain descending on the dome over their heads, could no longer restrain her sobs and tears: it was not grief, it was not terror,—they came

she knew not why, either in sympathy with the nature of which she formed a part, or because her happiness was too great to bear, or that she feared the burthen of it might one day become less.

She whispered her anxieties to Valis, and he tried to reassure her by smiling at her vague tremors, and telling her that the happy were always fearful: but he looked up himself at the trembling walls of their dwelling, and the aspect of his face seemed to refute the confidence of his tone. It was not long before a blast of wind struck directly upon the dome, and bearing down its foundations deeper into the lake, pressed its fretted roof more closely over the heads of the lovers.

It was now that the apprehensions of Valis were aroused in their full force. In vain Neria endeavoured to persuade him, that there was nothing that they could do to oppose a calamity which threatened them at the instigation of powers so vast, as the wind and the stormy lake. In vain she implored him to lie down passive by her side, folded closely in the protecting leaves of his flower, there to rest quiet and secure from the storm, provided only that their home should itself remain standing, while the elements wrecking their fury on the things which opposed them, passed over, propitiated by their humble bearing. He left her, in spite of all she could

urge, dead with terror for him, while he essayed his unequal force against the wind, in upholding the roof which had sheltered their happiness, and which had it fallen in at the moment, would only have involved him the more surely in its destruction.

Fearful, and trembling, she followed him wherever he went, imploring him to return and await by her side, the deliverance which might come for them from a higher hand, or the end they were unable to avert. Despite her tears, and the tremor of her frame, her face had an aspect of patient courage which contrasted strongly with the turbid and baffled look of Valis, maddened as he was at the thought that she must perish, while he, who felt it as a right to be her deliverer from every evil, was tost about helpless in the whirl of the elements, unable to retain even a footing for himself, with the bold front he would have shown to the enemy.

Nëria did all that she could to calm him. She believed within herself that they must die, for like most earnest and timid creatures, she took a grave view of every contingency;—but even at the worst, to die thus, so young, each cradled in the other's arms, and rocked by the pulsations of a loving heart,—to die when they could look back upon their lives without one regret, and feel that if brief, their happiness had been so

great, that it might have been spread out over ages,—was not such a death in itself a beautiful destiny?

Valis might have felt that it was so; he might have borne it for himself alone, and have withdrawn his longing eyes from the perspective of happiness over which they lingered, while he felt in his deep heart that he could have loved her thus throughout all the ages of which she spoke; but he could not endure it for her,—for her in whom life had still new charms to develope, whose face he had so lately seen radiant with the foretaste of the coming hour; and he watched with sharpest agony, as he pressed her closely in his arms, the progress of the danger which menaced her.

“And it is through me that this misfortune is falling upon us!” thought Nöria, who beheld in everything adverse which threatened them, the realisation of her mother’s predictions. “If it was I alone that suffered, how sweet, how more than light, would be the penalty of my wilfulness; but my heart is reached through his,—I am punished by his agony!” And bitter as were her feelings at the sight of it, she drew down his head and looked into his eyes with a clear bright light in her own, with which she sought to inspire him with courage, to yield her up patiently to a destiny she so little dreaded for herself.

But Neria was a thing, a being, a spirit, that partook of woman's nature, and was passionate and inconsequent at times, as loving women are. The emotion of the moment was all absorbing for her, it could shut out the past and the future when it held sway,—but the future more than the past. In the arms which her husband opened to receive her there was safety and rest,—no matter for how long it might endure; as an imagined shelter against the fury of the storm, their clasp unfolded to her a new sense of delight, which the danger which threatened them, and death itself, were unable wholly to subdue. The masculine soul of Valis was differently constituted. Though a waif, as she was, upon the stormy waters, he still struggled and rebelled against her fate and his own; a sense of responsibility on her account, pressed him ever to renewed and helpless efforts:—that the shape so endeared to him should become the sport of the winds and the waves, was as much a shame, can I say it?—to his manhood, as he felt it a torture to his heart. Woman accepts her fate, and draws such sweetness from the bitter draught as she is able: man resists his with a blind valour; and this is her fortitude and his courage.

The storm raged on; the flashes of lightning followed each other in more rapid succession, the branch overhead reeled to and fro, and groaned

in the wind, while the waters swelled like a heaving heart wounded by the inconstancy of a friend, or dashed back an angry defiance, when caprice had urged them too far. The frail shelter of the lovers,—frail before the storm as it had been resistless to them,—trembled in the breeze, and seemed likely, with every renewed gust, to fall down over the helpless heads it covered.

“Oh Valis, my Valis!” cried Neria, retaining him in her clinging arms as he was about to start up afresh, “it may be that in spite of the tumult which is raging around us, we shall live to see peaceful days; but if it be not so, if it is decreed that we shall die now, is there no comfort in the thought that we die together? A little while longer of happiness, and you might mourn over your Neria’s grave,—which of us could hope that it might be the fate of the other, to sit here in sorrow alone? If this dome which has made so sweet a sanctuary for our love, should shortly become our tomb, let us resign ourselves as beseems us, my Valis,—there is something within that tells me, there is worse which might befall us than this!”

Neria’s patience and constancy were triumphant, Valis’s rage was abashed before them. He sat down beside her still and calm amid all the turmoil of the elements, and gazed, as he thought, his last, upon that face which had beckoned him like

a destiny from his quiet life in the lake, where, dead and cold, they were shortly to return together.

What a world of love was concentrated in that one look ! it was as if he had borrowed from the future they were never to see, all of passionate fire which could have made it one long delight.

While the lovers were thus looking their last farewell to this mortal life, and its one great joy, they were so absorbed in their own overpowering sensations, as to be insensible to the accelerated force of the storm, and were only aroused from their rapt contemplation of each other, by a rushing sound close at their ears, by a deluge of watery drops passing over them, by a sudden flash of blinding light, and a shock of gusty wind which deprived them for the moment of breath. After that, all became vague and confused to their perceptions ; they had a dim consciousness of being hurled on their sides beneath the surface of the water, in the flowery vessels which seemed but as toys to the storm ; but they clung together still, and buoyant in their youth and health, righted themselves from the shock, and rode upon the troubled waters as before. When they had recovered from the confusion of their senses, they looked first at each other, breathed an ejaculation of praise that they were still together, and then cast inquiring glances around

them. They were in the free air, the lake stretching far on every side, the rent clouds hurrying away overhead, and the crescent moon visible in the pure sky, with the evening star trembling beside it. The roof that had covered them, their home,—dungeon, or bower, as love or loneliness had made it,—was floating away on the wings of the storm, which had thundered its last angry word in the shock which had rendered them their freedom.

The water was still turbid, and the grumbling of the summer tempest was heard as it passed away; but a delicious calm and coolness were in the air, and there was not a denizen of the lake or its borders, who did not send up, according to his measure, an ovation of grateful praise to the Giver and Preserver of all good. •

It will readily be believed, that our lovers were in no way behind in rendering this becoming tribute, but gave forth the most precious incense of gratitude, in return for their unlooked-for preservation.

It was with an awful joy that they looked around them upon the glories of nature, and behind them upon the death from which they had been snatched,—a joy which, however deeply it may have been felt, was not unmingled to either of them with trouble and fear. They cast their eyes often to the point where their pleasant

shelter had been borne away by the wind, and now that all was calm above, and there would have been nothing to immediately apprehend in continuing to dwell beneath it, I believe in my heart they regretted its peaceful shade. The world which was suddenly revealed to them, was so new to both, — to Valis because he looked upon it for the first time, to Neria because in the absorption of her wedded life, she had all but forgotten it, — that they felt disconcerted, if not alarmed, at the thought of venturing upon unknown ways. They stood hand in hand, like two spirits banished in wrath from their paradise, and trembling on the verge of a sphere in which they were ignorant of their allotted place, or the work which would be assigned them to perform. No one heeded, or had as yet discovered, their presence, the storm having given the good people of the district plenty of work in repairing their battered vessels, and setting themselves in order from its various effects, as also, in some cases, in bewailing its victims.

When Valis and Neria had each communicated their uneasy sensations to the other, they were in turn made light of, and they ended by mutually disclaiming them, and finding out all the advantages of their present position to set against the attractions of the one they had lost.

It was Valis, who, anticipating the wishes of

his little wife, proposed that they should go and render their duty to her mother: the desire had from the first been uppermost in her heart, but remembering that her anxieties for this only parent, had sometimes caused a temporary cloud to interpose between her husband and herself, she had forborne to press the subject thus early on his notice. It is needless to say that she hailed the proposition as coming from him with all joy, and they were soon on their way to the sad dwelling, which indeed was but a short distance from their own.

It will be remembered that the lady of Valisneria was no more, and the sorrow which bore down the tender heart of Neria, when she discovered that her mother had departed this life all uncheered and alone, may well be conceived. For herself she had sustained little loss in this stern parent, who had as little sympathy in the pleasures or cares of her child, as she had endeavoured to win from her for her own deep woe; and indeed it must be generally conceded, that the absorbing warmth of the conjugal relation in Flower-land, took something from the strength of other ties. But with all this, the grave which had closed between Neria and her mother, caused everything but her sad and still unknown lot, her grave and consistent carriage, and above all her tender relationship to herself, to

be forgotten by the former; and the little wife needed all the consolations of her husband to support her under the first shock of her bereavement.

Nor were these consolations wanting to her, now that her grief had assumed a shape so tangible, as that of the sudden knowledge of a mother's loss. Valis taxed his generous heart for every suggestion which could give her comfort, and had his best reward in the grateful acknowledgments she was never too sad to make him, and after a time, in the returning cheerfulness which she at first only forced upon herself as his due. They had passed together through every phase of delight; they had clung to each other in the anguish of mortal fear; they had given thanks as with one voice for their deliverance; and now that he had taken her sorrows as his own, there were established between them the sweet relations of the comforter and the comforted, and there was wanting not a link to their perfect union.

The crescent moon and its attendant star grew brighter in the heavens as the evening advanced, and the revolution in the seasons was bringing round again the festive time, to which the young and the gay in the Land of Flowers looked forward as the most brilliant of their year. Neria had al-

ready, with all a wife's fond pride, presented her husband to her friends ; and her reviving spirits had been more elated by the effect she felt assured his personal advantages, physical and moral, had produced on them, than they could possibly have been through any other channel.

Her meeting with Sundew, to whom her own goodness and the impressionable warmth of her nature, had attached her in a greater degree than she merited, was fraught with much pleasure to them both. Neria felt so sure of her friend's sincere sympathy in the great good which had befallen her during her mysterious absence ; and it was certainly one of the pleasantest tokens of the depth and reality of the happiness which had resulted from it, that she greeted all her friends on her return to them, with a satisfaction as hearty, as if she had found them overwhelmed for her loss. Sundew, whose wild humour seemed to yield in a measure before the gentle influence of Neria, allowed to her friend, as a great wonder for her, the gratification of her weak point, and praised the incomparable Valis, or suffered her to praise him, to her heart's content. If there intruded sometimes into the more extravagant of these concessions, a spice of mischievous enjoyment, the good faith, and loving enthusiasm of Neria, were too entire to admit of her perceiving it ; and every

feeling not absorbed by Valis, was gratefully bestowed upon Sundew.

Nor was Willy-nilly herself without a theme on which she might tax in turn the sympathies of the little wife. Bobadil furnished it still, as he had done in those early days when the two maidens had sate together, and Neria's heart, which had as yet learnt no experience for itself, had saddened at the supposed experience of her companion.

"Alas yes!" said Sundew, who, wilful and capricious as she was, could by no means forego the distinction of a love sorrow—that privilege of her sex and years; "it is still with us, Neria, as in the time you left us. He loves me to folly, I love him to frenzy, but—the dragons or ghouls must have got upon our track—he who so loves me makes my torment, as I fear, indeed, I do his!"

"It is incomprehensible, dear Sundew," returned Neria with a face of grave concern for she believed herself to be a great authority in matters of the heart; "he loves you, you say—as indeed who can wonder?—and he torments you! you love him,—and you fail to make him happy!"

"Precisely, my love," admitted Sundew,—"it is a very strange case, this of ours,—there hangs some heavy mystery over us, I fear—but

the course of true love never *does* run smooth, — as you may have learnt, you know, from your own case. Excuse me for laughing," she added, breaking off for a moment to indulge her mirth, "what we have been talking of is grave enough, I am sure, to sadden a bee in a rose-bush, — but do you remember that Bobadil asked leave of your mother to marry you? Ha ha! it is the merriest idea! He loves me so much that if he thought it would spite me, he is capable of marrying my mother."

Nëria said nothing to this sally, but cast her blue eyes up and down between her lap and Willy-nilly's countenance, and looked the very picture of puzzled propriety.

"Why, what a jewel of a little wife it is!" pursued the lively maiden; "you look as much scandalised, and as queer and pretty a little object, as when I frightened you with telling you of my wicked ways on the morning of your first appearance. I declare, if you continue to look so preposterously good, I shall be half inclined to compassionate your Valis, and to think he must sometimes feel very dull with such a model little matron as you are!"

Nëria thought he would be beginning to feel very dull *without* her, and felt that she was getting very dull *without him*; but though a little hurt at Sundew's thoughtless levity, she

imputed it all to her exuberant spirits, and wished her a grave farewell, without paining her by disclosing what was passing in her mind. Willy-nilly was hurrying away, when she suddenly returned, and throwing her arms about the fair little wife, kissed her affectionately.

“You are a rose of sweetness!” she exclaimed, “I wish I was like you; but we are all fitted for our several vocations; — you to soothe and to smile down the wayward humours of your stormy lord, — I, to stir up and keep in life the flagging spirits of my — Bobadil! *Adieu*, — I go where duty calls, as you do!” She bounded away, and left Neria to hasten after her husband alone.

But not alone for long; Valis had returned to meet her, and seemed so drooping, and was evidently so ill, that the heart of Neria quailed and with no new sorrow or fear, as she greeted him. He was flushed and excited nevertheless at this moment, and chided her for her absence, alleging that he had suffered an agony of suspense and fear on her account. It was true indeed that he had done so, however unfounded his alarm, and for a short while after her return, he visited upon her, in unjust reproach, all that he had experienced of anxiety at her delayed appearance. She bore it with the customary sweetness which never failed to raise a storm of reactionary penitence on the part of Valis; and the renewed

compact of their scarcely broken peace, having been duly ratified to the immense satisfaction of both, they resolved to take advantage of the beauty of the weather, to make an exploring expedition in the neighbourhood of their home. Néria, in right of her former experience, however limited, felt herself raised on this occasion to the office of guide, and experienced as great delight at the admiration of Valis at the scenes which opened for the first time to his view, as if she herself had created them all, for the purpose of affording him delight.

When they bent their eyes on the placid lake, brightened by the reflection of the starry firmament, or sent their gaze upwards through that more fathomless depth of azure sky, they could not but feel thankful that it was permitted to them to wander together, and in freedom, through scenes which made so fitting an arena for the expansion of the limitless love of their hearts.

In the course of these happy wanderings, in which there was left them neither the time or the inclination to regret the shelter which had been ravished from them by the storm, they came upon a group of three fair maidens, seated modestly together in a little nook, out of sight of the ordinary passers by.

Néria remarked their timid faces with interest, and pointed them out to Valis ; when in the same

moment a whisper and a flutter were observable in the party, and the young husband, hastening towards them, was soon surrounded by, and exchanging affectionate greetings with, his sisters.

The joy of Neria at this unexpected encounter was greater by far than that of Valis, who, after having replied to the questions of the youthful trio, and given them a rapturous account of his happiness and the perfections of his mate, became as wholly absorbed in his accustomed devotion to the latter, beaming as she was at this moment with emotions of kindness and sympathy, as if they had no longer been present. The sisters, on their part, expressed themselves enchanted at having met, on their entrance into life, with so sweet a connexion, who would stand by them doubtless in the difficult path, and give them that countenance and protection which was denied them in a mother: — upon which Valis, overhearing the claim, broke in to tell them that he feared their young and, in every sense, *belle sœur*, would not be able to become all to them that they proposed; that he and his Neria entered very little, or not at all, into the gay world in which they themselves would naturally desire to appear: that they lived for their love, which was everything to them; and that they could not think of curtailing its enjoyments by the assumption of such responsible cares. He laid down some general rules of

conduct, which he enforced with brotherly interest, and bade them take courage, while he assured them that they would find in the world upon which they were entering, many young creatures less protected than they were, as wanting that mutual guidance and support, they were sure of finding in each other. To this Nöria added her affectionate entreaties, that, in any circumstance of difficulty or uneasiness, they would immediately come to her, when she and her Valis would take counsel on their case, and give them the benefit of their united assistance. She kissed the three timid little sisters of her husband, to whom her heart was quite drawn in their modest diffidence, and suffered Valis to lead her away to a lovely and secluded spot, in which, as they reposed themselves for a time, he recounted to her with such eloquence the whole story of his love, that although she could have anticipated its every expression, she became quite lost to the world, and all else that it contained, in hearing it so fervidly from his lips.

To all this happiness there was one dire, but fortunately, not ever-present, drawback. The glad spirits of Valis, the triumph of his vivid soul over natural obstacles, failed often to disguise from the watchful eyes of Nöria, that his health was seriously failing. His strength declined from day to day; and at times she was piteously alive to her

grief, and possessed somewhere in the mysterious recesses of her being, a dim consciousness of that which was the hopeless cause, of an effect which was fraught with such consequences to them both. But there were again times when the joy of the moment filled her being to the exclusion of every thought, and there were also moments when she fondly trusted that her Valis's life was not dependent on the conditions which governed her own, and that of the other existences with which she was acquainted, but could be maintained to its natural term, in spite of them. Feeling that it was beyond his power to comply with her wishes if he would, she pressed him no longer with unavailing entreaties: she would gladly have nourished him from her own veins, with her own breath, her own life—but it could not be. Spirit though he was, he had a mortal existence inseparably connected with the fate of his flower,—he had loosened the bonds which should bind him to that existence, and having wrought out his own destiny, must abide by its accomplishment. It may be that the subtle perceptions of Nürria, which often carried her to the ultimatum of reason without its slow and toilsome workings, had gathered from the meeting of Valis with his sisters, fresh cause for her agonising fears,—in short, that the estrangement of feeling of which she had been conscious on his part, had not

failed to realise to her idea, how far and how irrevocably, he was separated from their common root. However this may be, it is certain that as the two sat together in the bower in which they had chosen to rest themselves by the way, the look of rapt attention with which Neria listened to Valis's tale of love, was often exchanged for one of anguish and shrinking terror, whose cause he pressed her to reveal to him in vain.

A long while had been passed in the shady spot, and they were beginning to acknowledge the necessity of returning to their home, which they had purposely deserted thus long, believing that its neighbourhood would have been for some time past, the scene of a gaiety and excitement, for which their full hearts felt no need. They returned, then, laughing to themselves as they made their way under cover of the shadows cast here and there over the lake, and gained their domicile by a back path, without having been recognised by any of the pleasure seekers who were abroad.

Crouched down quietly in their accustomed places, hand in hand and close by each other, they hoped that they might watch and enjoy — barring the occasional interruption of Neria's prophetic fears, — the pretty scene which was spread out before them, free themselves from the observation of others, until the season of rest should put a stop to the gala.

CHAP. X.

"They who thus in star-lit vales
Listen to the nightingales;
They may sometimes fairly doubt
That far more cunning sprites are out
Than ever taught the little throats
Of birds, to trill melodious notes."

Edward Quillinan.

AND now let me portray with a few touches for the better comprehension of my readers, the appearance which the lake presented on these occasions of diurnal, or, as it seemed to its gay denizens, of annual festivity.

Its surface was at this time as bright, and, but for the floating movements of the dancers, would have been as still, as the mirror which doubles the lineaments of beauty, and gave back faithfully the images of the stars, which in the diminished^{*} lustre which was left to them after their journey through space, looked scarcely more bright or beautiful, than the spirits which trampled over, or wheeled in fantastic circles, around their reflected beams. Nor was the light of the stars which met them from above and below, the sole illumination provided for their festival. The bank, tufted with grasses and inlaid with moss,

which bordered the lake on the side devoted to the chief promenade, was thickly studded with lamps, which the bearers (for they were not fixed in dead walls like all others which I had seen,) carried over the dark field of herbage and moss, with a soft and ceaseless motion through the night; by which artful device, there was imparted a sensation of life and variety, which could not fail in its influence on the spirits of the beholders. Not the least of the enjoyments offered to the eye, was to be drawn from the contemplation of the motley company, to grace whose hour of mirth, such delicate expedients had been devised; and here, as in all else I observed, *variety* lent a zest to the charm experienced. • The faces—some swart, some fair, some roguish, some gay, some timid and sentimental, others arrogant, mischievous, or downright elvish,—looked as if they had been drawn together from separate, and distant kingdoms; while the rare intermarriages which were the result of this good fellowship, left the deep markings and peculiarities of the different races, undisturbed. In the matter of costume the same refreshing individuality and absence of conventional proprieties, was observable. The dress of every creature upon whom my eye rested, appeared to symbolise the characters of himself and his tribe, without the slightest concession to the prejudices of his neighbours; and this, added to

the effect produced by their highly demonstrative lineaments, enabled you to arrive at once, at their mental bias and favourite pursuits, which to a student of nature would have made the company in which I found myself far more interesting than that in which the length of the face, with the subjects of discourse and colour of the clothes, is prescribed by law. In this fantastic reunion there was something to charm every sense. There was music swelling up like a choral peal, bursting forth often when least expected, from a band of musicians hidden between the tapering spires of a tuft of grass; then dying away into a whisper soft as the sigh which preludes sleep, to be taken up in an enchanting modulation, by an orchestra in the dry branches of the trees overhead; then handed from that to others and to others, till you were bewildered with harmony, and could not tell whether you were the most enchanted with the wild freedom which excluded the idea of art from the performance, or the vague consciousness that with all this seeming licence, there was an order and system pervading the whole, though it was too subtle for your feeble perceptions to follow. There were perfumes of every variety of savour, delicate and pungent, sweet and acidulated—but which continually evaporated, continually renewed, as they rose into the pure, free air, might

have been inhaled by the most sensitive organs without fatigue. There were cool, glossy garments, pleasant to the touch; and floating silky hair, which brushed often the faces of the dancers as they passed each other in their giddy course: all was excitement and exhilaration, beauty and delight; had I sat myself down to imagine a scene from fairydom, I could not have conjured up a gala so brilliant, or indebted to expedients of such wonderful art for its success.

Valis and Neria sat and looked upon it all, and whispered their approving satisfaction to each other; while so fully did they identify themselves with everything beautiful which passed before them, that although conscious that they shared it all with the throng of gay flutterers that were there, they could not help feeling that it belonged in an especial manner to themselves; and since however much our own an object may be according to the general opinion, we can only be said truly to *possess* that which we *enjoy*, their feeling may have been in a measure correct, for it is certain that none of the light beings who glanced through these wonderful scenes, were conscious of a pleasure in them like that which animated this loving pair.

When they had gazed upon, and enjoyed the festive scene for some time, turning their eyes ever upon each other when anything very funny

or unforeseen took place, and never failing to let their lips meet upon the same occasion,—the shadow of some object on the banks of the lake was observed to spread between them and the light of the moon. A flutter and a whisper ran like flashes of electricity through the motley company upon the lake, and before I could find time to bestow a thought upon the apparition which had occasioned the panic, or make a single observation as to its possible nature, every flower among them was reposing upon the water, its petals closed over the airy shape within, as still, as breathless, and seemingly devoid of life, as if they had never moved by myriads, as I had beheld them but the moment before, to the wild music of the zephyrs upon a midsummer night. What could it mean, this sudden hush which had fallen upon these glad beings in the midst of their mirth? I looked at them in amazement as they lay pell-mell, one over the other, in groups or in pairs, just as they had dropped down in their interrupted career,—with here and there an elvish face, or a low chuckling laugh, issuing from between the folded leaves. It was really a very droll scene, the like of which I had never witnessed before,—all this giggling and elbowing of the spirits, as they crouched beneath their sheltering leaves, in whimsical enjoyment of their secret. It was not until the shadow, which I now per-

ceived was that of some human colossus, had quite passed from over them, that they ventured upon a short whispered conference, and after many jealous peerings to the right and left, started again from their hiding places, and recommenced their festive operations with wilder gestures than before.

It was not long after this, that Valis and Neria, who it must be known had shared in the general panic, were discovered by Sundew in their chosen retreat, looking out, as she said, from that quiet corner, upon a world whose best pleasures they stole for themselves, without giving anything in return. Sundew, who had prosecuted an unsuccessful search for them at the period they had been on their travels, and was annoyed at having been betrayed into such an unsatisfactory expenditure of her time, determined now, in her own wild way, that they should both smart for it a little when she found them; and with this laudable resolution, had set out a second time, intent on their discovery if they were still among the living. It was a long time before it occurred to her that at this season, when all the world was roaming, they would possibly be hiding themselves in their own little bower; and as for every step she took on the wrong track, her desire to spite them for her pains, increased by several degrees, it will be imagined

that she was in rather a dangerous mood, by the time she ultimately reached them. As however when most mischievously inclined, she was generally the most easy and gay, even Neria, who knew her the best of the two, was far from expecting any harm of her, when she darted upon them in their concealment, and thrusting aside the tendrils of which they had made a kind of trellis, assailed them with her playful raillery.

“Together!” she exclaimed, “in this dreary little hole. Why you must be two of the wittiest creatures on the lake to be able to keep each other awake in this corner; and here you are, you selfish things, excluding the world from the enjoyment of your talents! We knew you were hiding in some out-of-the-way place, and have all been protesting against it. Had I been sure that there were four conjugal eyes peering through this screen, I should never have found courage for a single step! I should have been seized with a tremor if I had met them suddenly, like the little bird I saw awhile ago, that could not take his eyes off a serpent! Oh! but that was droll to see,—the little fool, how he trembled and stared! But indeed, my dear, I should have trembled too, if I had had only an idea that you were here; to run the gauntlet of such critical glances, one had need to be graceful as a harebell!”

And Sundew made a step which placed her in front of Valis, and softly waving her arms on either side and bowing her head by way of salutation, made no unsuccessful imitation, in spite of the diffidence which oppressed her, of that suavity of motion which distinguishes the creature of which she spoke.

“Valis,” she said, “I give you greeting: your wife and I are the oldest friends,—at least as old as we well can be! On the strength of our friendship I am going now to take you away, and present you to my mother, who is dying to see you. Do not weep, my sweet Neria, or smile so like the lily that you are,—you look as if you could be so very long-suffering that there is not one husband in a thousand who would not be tempted to beat you. Shall I leave you my necklace, my stomacher, my scarf, as pledges that I will bring him again?”

The young wife smilingly told her that she had a pledge of his return which sufficed to her; and Valis, who had risen from his place at Neria's side, and returned the airy civilities of her friend with the best grace he could command, was too chivalrous to deny himself to the request of a lady, and professed himself quite at her disposal. Balancing himself lightly, and apparently without effort, in the fairy bark which still swayed to

and fro with the movement by which he had sprung to his feet, Valis stood for a moment face to face with the artful Willy-nilly, whom he attentively regarded. She on her part, unable to meet this scrutiny without betraying more of the mischief lurking within her than would have suited her purpose, hung her head, and looked modestly askant, while in her confusion, and to conceal her smiles, she bit off the wings of a little green fly which she had lately attached to her string of trophies. Valis felt a strange sinking of the heart, as he turned away from the coquette, and gave a farewell kiss to his little wife. But he was scornful of danger, and would have despised himself had he owned to a fear; so with a whisper assuring her of his speedy return, and a renewal of those blissful moments which had been so rudely interrupted, he waved his hand to Sundew to proceed, and languidly, and with many fond glances behind him, prepared to accompany her on her way. The gay maiden entertained him during their progress with the most enthusiastic praises of his bride. "What beauty has been awarded to her," she said, "what sweetness, what worth, — above all, how exquisitely natural she is! It is this, after all, which is the most attractive of her gifts, — that guileless yielding up the reins to nature, — O Valis, I can tell you there is nothing like it!

And then it is really so very easy, that we can all attain to it if we choose; not in her way, it is true, who is a lily born, and whose nature only leads her to good, — but we can all follow out the bent of our inclinations, and be generous or sordid, mopish or merry, cross or kind, open or sly, idle or diligent, or malicious, or roguish, or anything else for which our nature has designed us. I myself am an humble individual with many faults, and a passion for frolic and fun which has led me into mischief before to-day, but I may say for myself that I am natural, — in my own way, you know. Oh, I am no pattern-flower, — it is a way quite different from Neria's!" Valis was amused with the candour of his fair companion, and thus talking they beguiled the short distance which led them to her mother, who sat chattering with a bevy of elderly ladies, who eyed him with great approbation, and whispered to each other that he was a young scion of the house of Valisneria, married to the beautiful daughter of the late widow.

Zobeide might be said to receive him with open arms: she asked a great deal after Neria, and dwelt pathetically on her frantic efforts to discover her traces after she had disappeared; and received only a very slight check to her friendly loquacity, on being corrected by one of her intimates as to the date at which she had ex-

perienced the misfortune of her loss. The good little lady looked rather older than she had done formerly, and as her hair and eyes were unfortunately as black as ever, she had the appearance of being even more wizened and witch-like. I had no time to remark individually the ladies who formed her coterie, but was struck, in the hasty glance I took at them, with a suitability of costume quite different from anything I had been accustomed to witness. Instead of wrecking their unavailing spite upon time, by showing the ravages he had made to every eye, the more these elderly dames were disfigured by his harsh dealings, the more sedulously they contrived to conceal his work; until by closing soft and sober-tinted draperies over the tenantless sites of vanished charms, they presented the aspect of comely ruins, hoar indeed, but gracefully mantled, and having a twilight charm of sentiment lingering about them, like the reflection in the sky of a set sun. No wonder if there are those who shrink from the very thought of growing old, when the associations of withered arms, and necks from which the bones are protruding like roots above the soil, are so intimately linked with the idea! I mention these thoughts as they were suggested to me at the moment, and begging pardon for the digression, return to follow the steps of Willy-nilly, who having left Valis in the safe keeping of her mother's tongue, hastened

to look for Bobadil, on whom she reckoned for assistance in the working out of her freak. She was more fortunate in her search this time, for she found the Bee-king almost before she had begun to look for him; the truth of the case being, that he had himself been keeping her in view for some time past, and following up her erratic movements, as well as he was able, with his own more sober and portly ones. It happened that not long before, he had become disagreeably aware of the absurdity of his part in that capricious dance of fascination which Sundew was making him perform in the eyes of the world; and having declared to his circle for the twentieth time, that he had exhausted all the amusement he was ever likely to obtain from her humours, he determined on crushing her beneath the desperate step, of becoming a Benedict without her aid. Having heard of the three fair sisters who had lately made their entrance into life, and who were also daughters of the good old stock he had before sought to graft upon his own, it occurred to him that an opportunity so favourable for making a choice, might be long before it again presented itself; and he accordingly proceeded to their abode in becoming state, resolved on selecting the fairest of the trio, and inwardly congratulating himself that the demise of the lady of Valisneria, had made it impossible that he could have to treat with her upon the subject. The

young ladies were very much fluttered at the aspect of the great man, who questioned them without reserve as to their capabilities and accomplishments, and Bobadil was on his part so little affected by the timid graces of the sisters, — which he contrasted, to their ineffable disparagement, with the pungent charms of Sundew, — that he left them, after a brief colloquy, without having accomplished the design of his visit. To have bestowed upon Bobadil in this mood, one of the modest little maidens of the Valisneria, would have been like offering a cup of new milk, to a man who was thirsting for ardent spirits. He returned therefore to his tormentor, — surely such beings are only made to be tormented, — more hopelessly at her mercy than ever ; and, fresh from his bootless expedition, was following her steps, when she caught sight of, and hastened to accost him.

“ Ah Bobadil, king of Bees ! ” she cried, “ what brings you so far from the hive ? I thought all the fair little flowers about, looked in great disorder, as if the spoiler had been among them ! ” Bobadil was not accustomed to this interpretation of the character conveyed in the title conferred on him by his enemies, and had much ado to conceal beneath the rakish air which he assumed as proper to it, the pleasure it actually gave him. But Sundew, who had calculated her advantage, did not fail to pursue it.

"Deceiver!" she said, as she slowly withdrew her eyes from his simpering face, "is this your allegiance? You will have a great deal to do to put me in good humour after this! I have been scouring the lake in search of you, and now, if you would do something to please me, there is not a moment to be lost. You see that little fair creature sitting all alone there in the shade? Hah false one!" she interjected with great vivacity, and giving him such a slap on the cheek as left it doubtful whether it were intended in malice or play, "I know you do, and not for the first time either. Well, no matter, she is my friend; we are agreed on all points save one, and I bear her no manner of ill will for that one subject on which we differ, which is simply that she does not see you with my eyes, and never did. But that is not what I was going to say. You must dance with her, Bobadil, this prim little beauty, for she is a young bride, and are you not the first and foremost in all the land of Flowers?" The Bee-king, although softened by the compliment, was about to excuse himself, and to question her, as he rubbed his cheek, tingling with her hasty assault, as to the motive she could have in making such a request, when Willy-nilly interrupted him, stamping her fairy foot with impatience.

"Dare not to question me!" she exclaimed, with a little grand air which she knew well how

to assume, "I am in a royal mood. Motives! — they are for your set musicians, — my fancies play like the wind in the long grass!"

"Yours may be the mood of a Sultana," returned Bobadil sullenly, "but mine is not that of a slave: your fancies are wild enough, no doubt, but I am not to be borne down before them like a reed!"

"You are a heartless monster, and have seen those you love better than your poor little Sundew," retorted this maiden of variable temper, as she dropped down in her flower, and became bathed in the first tears which Bobadil had seen her shed. "You might have had patience with me a little while longer," she continued, choking with sobs: "I know I am wild and wayward beyond my wont, but the poor fly treads smoothly over the glossy leaf where he is free, and struggles only in the web. The time of rest, when I am fairly caught, and all is over, will come for me, as it does for him; till then, dear Bobadil, give me my way, — if you deny it, I cannot take it, — but would you like to have me sit here for ever and weep?" The Bee-king, greatly appeased by a humility as unusual to his mistress as her tears, was pouring forth reassuring protestations, and suffering himself to be led by Sundew in the direction of her other victim; while all the time he blamed his evil stars which deprived him of so

fair an opportunity for terminating the long love skirmish betwixt them, by making her the offer of his hand at a moment when she was so tender and subdued. But as they were already standing before Neria ere he had been able to arrange his thoughts into proper shape, there was no help for it; and it only remained for him to submit to his fate, or the wishes of Willy-nilly, which with him was much the same thing, with the best countenance he could assume.

The little wife looked surprised when abruptly requested by Bobadil to join the dancers, and was on the point of excusing herself, when Sundew interposed in a whisper:—

“My dear Neria, you must not refuse to dance with Bobadil,—it is Valis who wished him to ask you. Are you ignorant of the custom of our society which decrees that a bride shall signalise her first appearance by treading a measure with some illustrious individual? Valis has been told of this necessity by my mother, and being a little jealous, as you are no doubt aware, has fixed upon Bobadil for your partner, because, you see, he might be younger, and is known to be in love with me!” Poor little Neria drooped her head, and looked very puzzled and distressed at this announcement. She never questioned for a moment the assertion of her friend, but there was a warning voice in her

heart which told her, that, however Valis might have been induced to consent to the proposal, it was one which had afforded him little pleasure. Incapable of concealment, she confided her views of the case to Sundew, who laughed at her very heartily in return, and said she could have declared by Valis's face he had been a tyrant to his wife, as he evidently was by her own showing; and that she saw now how the commands he had laid upon her through others, were all a feint to deceive them, for that she had been trained beforehand to practise this virtuous resistance. With these and other remarks even yet more stinging and pointed, did Sundew assail her poor little friend; who, grieved and angered, and on the point of melting into tears, cast perturbed glances right and left, in the hope that her Valis might be coming to her rescue. It was not until this hope had been found to fail, that she resigned herself to the lordly Bobadil, who advanced with her to an area which Sundew took care to have cleared, for the better display of their evolutions. Before they commenced Bobadil had found time to whisper a few words into the ear of his mischievous inamorata.

"You love me, Sundew," he said; "it is in vain you attempt to conceal your passion. Never fear,—I will make you happy, maiden,—you shall be my wife, and as such will be courted, envied, admired, and extolled, by every one who

knows the name of Bobadil!" The thing was done, he awaited no thanks; but, the music striking up at the moment, moved grandly away with a self-satisfied air, and engaged in the preliminary observances of the dance, consisting in a pantomimic invitation to his partner to take her share in the measure which was to ensue. The dance was a wild and fantastic one, in which gestures with the arms, and the changing postures of the body, took the place at first of regular steps; and I had not regarded it long before I became aware that both with Neria and Bobadil, it was a species of, I might even say, a direct improvisation. This discovery, as was natural, added tenfold to my interest, developing, as it could not fail to do, the widely different characters of the performers. That of the Bee-king presented itself under a singular aspect. He was evidently in high good humour, not only with himself, but with all who came within reach of his benignity, and replied to the murmurs of admiration which greeted the appearance of his fair companion, with an affable wave of the hand, and a smile intended to assure them that he graciously accepted the becoming manifestation, which it is needless to say he took wholly to himself, together with every future ebullition of the popular feeling in favour of his partner. This unconscious appropriation on the part of Bobadil, led, before he had finished, to

some awkward results; for imagining that the plaudits followed on certain attempts at activity which he had displayed, and which his weight and corpulence rendered painfully difficult to him, he was urged on by his vanity to pursue them to a point which almost threatened his existence, while the most obstinate of his admirers was fain to turn away laughing, at an exhibition so opposed to the habits of the drowsy Bee-king.

While the spectators were divided between admiration and mirth, Nöria, alike unconscious of either of the feelings excited by the performance in which she was taking a part, had caught her cue from the music, and was gradually forgetting the trouble of her mind, in the new pleasure her nature had so evidently formed her to experience, in giving, as it seemed to her, a sort of visibility to sound, in that harmony of motion which it suggested. If she had at first seemed timid and constrained, it was the doubt of her Valis's approval of the act in which she was engaged, that alone had caused her to be so, since not one among all the strange voices which filled her ear, had power to raise a throb in that faithful little heart. As her doubts and fears gave way before her strong instincts of the right and the natural, in what she was about, with all her characteristic earnestness of purpose,

she yielded herself up to the new delight, and with her shining wings spread out in the breeze, and the long tresses of her hair floating upon it like golden pennants, she clove the waters in her fairy bark; now impelling it onward with outstretched arms, and figure bent forward over the prow; now turning it round with a sweep of her arm, and a hand stretched out as an index of its route; now throwing herself back, while she seemed to give the impulse to her vessel by a foot placed a little in advance, and appearing to woo the stars to her embrace as she looked up at them with a face of smiling awe, and almost sunk down upon her bended knees. It seemed to me that the whole of this performance was an exact interpretation of the thoughts conveyed to her in the music; — that the dancing of Neria, if dancing it could be called, was a rendering in its fullest integrity of the same idea, the difference being solely in the language by which it was expressed; it also appears to me that at the time I witnessed it, the meaning of each movement and sound in combination, was as clear to me as the most ordinary matter which can be conveyed to our sense in words; but it fades from me now when I would seek to grasp it, like the beautiful things which we know we have seen in dreams, but are unable to restore to the waking memory. If I did not fear to mar the

effect of that which I remember with certainty, by hazarding a surmise as to that which has become indistinct, I should say that the sentiment of *aspiration* formed the main idea of Neria's opening movement, while that which succeeded it soon after, might point at happiness accomplished. If I am correct in this, it was aspiration on the part of Bobadil, which rose no higher in him than the desire to secure to himself such admiration as was suitable for a grasshopper or field-cricket, which, but for the timely interposition of his friends, might have been productive of more serious consequences than those which he had suffered in ridicule and fatigue. He was of a habit to which, in one of our own kind, we should apply the term of *plethoric*, and the symptoms he began to exhibit, as the result of his unusual exertions, were so alarming, that madame Zobeide, fearing she might lose a son-in-law, insisted on leading him away, when he might recover at his ease, and rest upon the laurels he had earned. I should scarcely have thought it worth while to mention this fact, had it not been owing to this defection of Bobadil, that another personage appeared upon the scene, to fill up the place of partner to the little fairy which the exhausted Belling had left vacant.

The new-comer was a youth of handsome

person, but of haughty and supercilious mien, which he could nevertheless vary, when he saw fit, with smiles which might be said to be rather fascinating than prepossessing. Less gaudily decorated than Bobadil, he was evidently of superior rank, and the curiosity with which he was regarded on all sides, suggested the idea that he was a stranger, probably from some distant land.

As the eyes of Neria had never for a moment rested on Bobadil since he had conducted her to her place in the circle opened for their evolutions, it was little to be wondered at that she was completely ignorant of the substitution of another in his room; and on the music, led on by a nightingale who had been suddenly awakened, breaking forth into another and gladder strain, that she should obey the impulse it had given to her spirits, without a thought or a question if it were shared by him. In all she thought, and in all she did, there could be but one partner present to Neria's idea; and it was at that beloved face which seemed to fill the space now so near her, that she looked; it was that dear hand which in fancy she clasped, and drew with her ever on her sportive way. She did not see the well poised figure which was circling around her, the admiring eyes which marked her wherever she went, and the subtle approaches from which she turned as by an instinct, without so much as a recognition

of their presence. A joy, perhaps more intense, but not more exalted, than that of a child who plays at bo-peep between the locks of its mother's hair, seemed now to have seized upon the lovely Neria. With her hand folded closely at her side as if it clasped that of another, she seemed to push and pursue her little bark over the lake, while her loving looks all bent on objects immediately within her reach, were highly contrasted with the restless, longing, passionate eagerness, with which she had looked after the distant stars.

While Neria is bounding in her dance of delight over the lake, we must return for a moment to the other persons connected with her story. No sooner had Sundew beheld Bobadil and her fair little friend, in full career according to her wish, than she hastened after Valis, whom her natural cunning had taught her would be grievously displeased at the display, and towards whom it must be confessed, as the devoted adorer of another, she bore no very good will. As Valis on his part was hurrying on the wings of his impatient love, back to his little wife and their bower-home, he was met by the artful maiden, who called after him, as he passed her in his impetuous course.

“Ho Valis! whither away at this wild speed? the bird is not in the nest!” she pointed as she spoke to an opening in the ring of airy figures

which inclosed a space to the left of where they stood, and Valis springing forward with a bound, beheld his Neria as she balanced and turned, the centre of a hundred admiring eyes. His first impulse was to fly towards her, and bear her away from this unknown throng, these beings all so strange to him, with whom it seemed the thread of her existence must have become entangled without her will; but as he caught her unconscious, innocent smiles, and her bounding motions so full of joyous ease; still more when he marked the gallant cavalier at her side, whose fiery glances were following her every movement,—a sudden and sickening pang shot through his frame, and seemed to freeze the current of his life at its highest tide. He fell back into the ranks of her indifferent admirers, trembling and ghastly with rage, and while he was so blinded by his emotions that everything faded from before him, his torturing fancy was busy in retouching the picture, with the most trenchant colours and exaggerated outlines. It was easy to see, as Valis stood there, with his wild eyes, feverish lips, and haggard looks, while the fantastic beings in whose midst he had lately been, peered at him curiously and left him alone, as if there had been something in his nature from which they shrunk, — it was easy to see, I repeat, that he was sick as well as sorry; and I saddened at the thought that

the merry dance of Neria must so soon have an end, for it seemed to me as if in that, she was taking her farewell of the happiness whose playful effervescence it symbolised.

It was curious as a spectator to mark the varied passions which agitated these creatures of the lake, — the moon shining over all. There stood Valis with his angry brow, and arms sullenly folded across his breast; beside him was Sundew, who it might be supposed was enjoying the malicious triumph which accident had aided in rendering so signal, — but now pale, and angry almost as Valis himself, gazing at the handsome partner of her friend, from whom all her arts had failed in extorting, more than a passing glance of smiling scrutiny. To the right of them was a group composed of Bobadil and his friends, who were fanning him as he reclined half dead from his fatigue, with a sort of punkah made out of butterflies' wings; among the most active and zealous in her good offices was Zobeide, who dashed water in his face, and brushed up his hair, and opened his vest, and settled him in his place, and beckoned angrily to her daughter to come and testify her interest, all within the space of half a minute. And there before them in the face of all, was Neria, betrayed into telling in her own way, and with that absence of disguise which distinguished these people, the tale of her innocent

happiness. Valis had scarcely been regarding her a minute ere she caught sight of him, and forgetting in her feeling of the absence of all wrong, her fears that what she did could be displeasing in his eyes, her bounding steps did but catch a more joyous impulse, as she directed them towards him, and sought to entice him to join her in the dance. The eyes of Valis wrathfully gleaming beneath the lowering cloud of his bent brows, and the angry gesture with which he waved her off, recalled the poor little spirit, alas! too suddenly, to the knowledge of her position, and the recollection of her fears. Her airy motions came in a moment to a stop; she trembled in every delicate limb, her heart seemed to die within her, and her legs to refuse their support; she tottered against the side of her vessel, and stretched out her hands in her helplessness to Valis: he had turned away and did not see her, but others, who were witnesses of the scene, came forward, and she was led from the spot, amidst the murmured wonder of the bystanders, to the quiet retreat from which she had been tempted. "Valis! Valis!" cried the voice of Neria's heart, but there was no Valis to answer. Oh but to see him, and to throw herself upon her knees, and implore his pardon for the pain she had given him, without a question as to the side on which the fault may have lain!

The sweet lively strain of the music had ceased, and there was a hush upon the lake, which sounded ominous to one whose terror gathered force from every circumstance.

"A torrent dance! a whirlwind! a storm-march!" cried a voice breaking the stillness with its high, excited tones; it was a voice at which Neria had thrilled in every pulse of her being, as at this moment she quailed in deadliest fear. She looked out through the hot tears which seemed to sear her cheeks, and beheld her husband seize round the waist the supple form of Sundew, and lead her breathless through the mazes of the wild dance. Other spirits joined in the ranks, but she saw only them. They floated before her like feverish phantoms,—through all the changing web of shapes, she never lost them for a moment. Louder, faster, madder, sounded the music, and more frantic and impetuous became the movements of the dancers. They rushed from point to point, or wheeled in giddy circles, while the lake swelled like a beating heart beneath their trampling footsteps, and the stormy reverberations of the music. As Neria sat and watched them through her tears, one by one the couples of dancers fell off, and Sundew and her husband were left revolving, bounding and flying on their mad career alone. It was evident to all other eyes than those of the little wife, that Willy-Nilly was heartily weary

of her part, — but *she* looked only on her husband, and marked with a failing heart his flushed cheek, lowering brow, and quivering and unequal motions. It was evident that Valis was feeling ill, and must suffer from these movements of terrible excitement, but she dared not arrest his course; he might have dashed her to the ground as he passed her, he might have gone over her on his wild way, and then she thought of his remorse, and became powerless to think or to act.

In the meanwhile the weight of Sundew, who had at first glanced proudly through the gay groups, with the princely partner whom she hoped might become an object of jealousy to the stranger who had so powerfully impressed her, — hung heavier and heavier upon the arm of Valis, till at last he was rather dragging than leading her on his way. But he bore her clinging weight, as he would have borne a feather; it may, indeed, have imposed some restraint upon his movements, which, unchecked by the relations to the soil which were owned by all the other spirits of the lake, might without it have known no bounds; but he hurried her hither and thither when she had ceased to aid herself, and if his partnership with her placed some limits on his excited career, she on her part was affected by her co-operation with him in a much more serious degree. Faint and exhausted, she felt as if on the point of being

dragged from her hold, and it was in vain that she implored him to let her free. He heard her without heeding, his passionate excitement was madness; and it was rage at length, and not weariness or pity, which overcame him, when he flung her from him trembling and pale as death, staggered back a few paces himself, and fell into the gentle arms which Nöria opened to receive him.

He had sustained some mortal injury, ruptured some vessel through which the sap of life must flow, and lay for a few moments quivering and gasping, all but insensible where he had fallen. But the power of his angry spirit was not even yet subdued, and recovering himself with an effort, he arose, and catching the arm of Nöria, without which frail support he would have been unable to steady himself, glided with hasty, though disordered motions from the scene where, instigated by his jealous rage, he had played so prominent a part.

CHAP. XI.

“By pathless marsh, by greenwood tree,
It is thy weird to follow me ;
To follow me through the ghastly moonlight,
To follow me through the shadows of night.”

It would appear as if the genius of dancing were bent on supplying candidates for the active cares of Zobeide, for no sooner was her occupation gone in the case of Bobadil, and the spirits of the little good dame beginning to flag, than her daughter fell sick on her hands from the very same cause, and in doing so dispelled her gathering vapours. It is doubtful whether, if this had not happened, the busy lady might not have been tempted to proffer her assistance to Nöria, in her attendance upon her husband ; but as matters stood, it is certain she experienced little regret in seeing him depart from out the sphere of her activity, as, however favourable the impression made upon her in the beginning by the extraordinary beauty of his person, she was sensible, in common with the other good people of the lake, of a vague feeling of dread and uneasiness in his company, before even he had given proof of the

violence to which passion might hurry him. The dislike and mistrust with which Valis was regarded by those among whom he had lately been mingling for the first time, was the more remarkable, as these people, accustomed to every variety among themselves, and to the exhibition of strong and uncontrolled workings of individual character, were usually candid and tolerant in their judgments. But so it was, that as Valis staggered from the scene, deriving more support than he would have liked to acknowledge, or was perhaps aware of, from the trembling wife who seemed clinging to his side, the buzz of disapproving comments which followed him from the admirer of the popular belle, whom his jealous madness had reduced to a state of insensibility, derived much of their animosity from the prepossessions which existed in his disfavour.

When the punkahs had been very busy for some time about the fainting form of Sundew, Bobadil himself having condescended to handle one for a moment; and when Zobeide had again put in requisition the whole of her simple pharmacopœia, and had taken the opportunity of repaying her wilful daughter for many a provoking trick, in the slaps and pinches she dealt her under colour of restoratives, the cares of her friends, and above all, the double dealing of her mother, appeared to be taking effect; for the maiden

opened her black eyes upon the group, then rubbed them very heartily, and stared round her again, perusing the faces within her reach with a dissatisfied look. She seemed to have returned to herself in no very good humour, for her first movement was to snatch the punkah from the languid hand of Bobadil, and throw it at his head, her second to arise and arrange her disordered garments, with a shake like that of a spaniel who has been thrown into the water, and her third to push aside her mother, and one or two others who cumbered her path, and with looks cast right and left, which defied them to follow her, to sweep through the crowd, and betake herself to a distant part of the lake.

Some time previous to the recovery and departure of Sundew, Valis and Nëria had stayed their wandering steps, and found a refuge farther from reach of their fellow beings than their former home, in the pleasant retreat where they had paused for a time in their rambles over the lake, and spent some happy hours, never to be renewed. As the two had passed at first through the invidious crowd, it had added to the pang^s to which Nëria was a prey, to feel that they were utterly without sympathy in their sufferings; but Valis was blind and deaf to everything which reached him from without; contemning in his pride of love the whole world, not comprised in two idolatrous

hearts. He pressed forward, with ever-increasing speed, while the terrified being who clung to, and yielded him her frail support, sought in vain to moderate his impetuous progress. Though she loved him to the exclusion of every regret which might have presented itself on leaving behind them a world which to her would have been so full of congenial sympathies, she was yet not proof against an indefinite fear, which had for its origin all that to her orderly nature, appeared strange and unaccountable in that of her husband. In addition to the weary weight of sorrow she bore in the knowledge of her Valis's suffering state, there was opening upon her another subject of terror, less vague, and more agonising, than the one I have mentioned. Valis's hurried course was leading him fast towards that point which formed the boundary of her own movements. Once past that spot, he must go forward alone, or drag her with him, a corpse upon his way. Alone! alone! without a being to comfort him, or shield him from the consequences of his own blind rage! Wringing her hands and tearing her hair, she threw herself before him in his way, and fell upon his breast. It was in vain she looked up with her beseeching eyes in his face; his fury was not yet subdued; but despair had lent her strength and courage; she clasped his knees, she hung upon his clothes, she drew

him along with her, faintly struggling and resisting as he was, and threw herself beside him into that safe asylum which in another moment they would have left behind them for ever. The crisis past, the courage which had sustained her through it, vanished too; and Neria sat sobbing and weeping beside her lord, without a word to say, or a thought that there was anything better to be done. I trembled when I remembered how in former times her tears alone had been sufficient to madden him; it was evident that this helpless being,—a creature born only for summer days, and the simple and obvious contingencies which should alone have attended so bright an existence—possessed nothing but her faithful and loving heart, to oppose against the accidents of a terrible lot. She wept and rocked herself to and fro, pressing her little hands in a passion of grief before the eyes which dared not meet those of her Valis in wrath, and scarcely venturing even in her own thought a vindication of that act which, however she may have performed it in compliance with his wishes, she now knew too well that he had condemned. Contrary to all my fears, the anger of Valis became suddenly exhausted, as he bent his eyes on the helpless creature on whom alone it could now have wreaked itself. If erring, she was so weak,—if culpable, she was still so beloved! Her fast falling tears fell like a torrent upon flame; his own sprung up

to meet and mingle with them; he looked at the pretty crown which she bowed down towards him in her grief, and from which the parted locks fell off like golden rays, and laying his hand lightly upon it, he gazed up at the heaven to which the instinct of all things teaches them to turn; and a prayer went up from his heart as an odorous sigh, that blessings might descend upon that idolised head like the dew of the morning, that she might never be visited with the wrong he believed she had done him, and be happy and comforted, and cared for, by one who watches over the smallest, when he should be no more! The gentle voice of Valis, rising through the stillness of that silent place, struck upon the ear of his sorrowful wife; who looking up through her tears, beheld him as he gazed into the moonlight, weeping like her, plentiful drops which poured unheeded over his wasted cheek, and with an aspect which, even to her, accustomed as she was to shapes of exquisite refinement, looked spirit-like in its fading beauty. She had expected to be withered in the breath of his wrath; she had thought to be cast away as a guilty thing, and to turn even from herself when she beheld the weight of the conviction written against her on her husband's brow: for the sternest aspect of that passion, which, strong as death, can be cruel as the grave, she was in a measure prepared;—but to see

him thus, his lordly pride humbled, his heart, so much stronger than her own, bowed down, powerless, subdued, undone, while forgiving her the wrong into which she had been betrayed, shot a pang through her heart more acute than the sharpest agony of fear. Her apprehensions of his anger appeased, her love and sorrow burst the bonds her terror had imposed upon them; she awaited no invitation, but threw herself into his arms with an impulse as passionate as sudden, and was folded closely to a heart which, whether in agitation or repose, had never known a throb but for her. But with his burning kisses there mingled tears, in his smiles there was a sad regret, in the wild joy which it seemed as if he snatched from fate, there was anguish still; and Nöria struggling to free herself, fell at his feet, and adjured him to tell her of her fault, and to reproach her, while she called upon him by every familiar and endearing name.

“See Valis, husband, love, life! look at me, I am here at your feet. You suffer, and through me; yes, Valis, through me,—what other could have the power of moving you thus? Tell me of my fault, reproach me for it, turn from me, spurn me, and let me die,—but do not look upon me thus, do not murmur those gentle words, do not weep as I should do, but you ——!” The voice of the unhappy Nöria was interrupted by her sobs,

as she clasped her Valis's knees and abandoned herself anew to her helpless sorrow.

"No, Neria, I will not reproach you," said Valis, in a voice which, though shaken by contending emotions, was as soft as the mood into which he had fallen; "so lovely, so peerless, you are made to be an idol, and to be worshipped blindly, as you are by me. Is it your fault that your poor Valis is not like you? You are a fairy, a nymph, a peri: I saw you from my lowly place in the bed of the lake; I aspired to you,—it was a presumptuous sin!—I left all the little that I possessed then, and came to you,—I came to you, and took you to myself when none were near to dispute with me the prize,—and have known, through you, some moments of rapture which were suited for other spheres than ours. You have been good to me, Neria,—you have been generous,—you have bestowed on me all that you were able to bestow; can I blame you for not giving me a love which my nature was not formed to inspire? Beings such as you, are made to be adored,—wretches such as I, to consume before them as a sacrifice." For long it was in vain that she pleaded her love, and pitifully bewailed herself. She thought that he could doubt it; that she looked about her as she wrung her hands, in the vague hope that something might rise up to restore her Valis to confidence, and acquit herself. Her

ideas, so clear and spontaneous in her own orderly path, were entangled by the difficulties of her present position; and the bitterest anguish she endured was from the thought, that it was possible some help might exist for her Valis, which her limited faculties did not enable her to perceive. He continued to weep, and to press her to his heart, to stroke her bright head, and to invoke blessings upon it from above, while he repeated, "You have been good to me, my Nöria; I bless you, and shall bless you with my latest breath; you have been generous, and bestowed on me what you were able; you cannot love me more, or otherwise, than heaven has fitted me to be loved, and you cannot make me love you less. Think of me kindly, O beloved, when I am gone, and remember that I have died for you!" "Pity, Valis!" I had almost cried, "for the poor little heart that is breaking at thy side;" but Nöria, in her extremity of misery, seemed to catch a sudden inspiration, and asked him if perhaps she had been deceived when, in dancing with the Bee-king, she had believed she was obeying his wishes.

"The Bee-king!" repeated Valis, startled again into sudden fury by what appeared her hypocrisy: "It was no Bee-king, but a stranger, an imp of darkness, who audaciously feasted his eyes on charms which I once called mine! Who was he, this wary hawk, who stole

thee, weakling, from the nest, when I was not there to stand guard over thee?" Nëria, trembling and at her wits' end, answered his question as well as she was able. She had not seen her stranger partner; she had been taken out to dance by Bobadil, being told that it was Valis's wish, — he came she knew not when, from she knew not where; but she looked so true as she told him the strange story, she made such appeals with her tender blue eyes to the heaven which was above them, her love spoke so eloquently in her despairing grief, that even jealousy could not refuse to be convinced; and Valis, wholly appeased by the explanation extorted by his questions, caught the trembling little form again to his heart, and bent himself wholly to making her those sweet amends, which had ever so quickly atoned for his errors.

But Nëria, though her forgetfulness of the injury he had done her was as complete as it had been in times past, by no means shared the joyful confidence of her husband, when he told her that he saw floating away from before them, the last cloud which would ever obscure their bliss. While she yielded herself up to his fond caresses, there was a sorrow like a canker at her heart, which had fastened upon it in the midst of her youth and her joy, never again to be wholly laid at rest. She looked at the pallid face of her Valis, at his

sunken cheek, and eye which was languid with all its fire, and buried her face in his bosom, in the vain attempt to shut out the thoughts she had not the courage to affront. Valis was dying, yes, dying, — his summons had come. Another than he had been able to overcome the shock which he had sustained in the indulgence of his wrath, but with him, all alone and isolated as he stood, cut off by his own deed from the ministrations of nature, with nothing to assist the powers of reproduction, the first chance stroke, from whatever quarter it had come, must have hastened to a close his already numbered days.

It was something of this consciousness which was experienced by the unhappy Nerin, as she gazed upon her husband's face, composed as it now was into the deep sleep of weariness and exhaustion. She would have liked to hold him thus for ever, his head laid against her heart; a little flickering smile passed over her face; it is possible she thought of what death might be, if it were like this, and if, while in separating them from all by which they were surrounded, it would leave them still to each other. If such were indeed the reflections called up by her singular destiny in a being of whose nature reflection made no part, it may have been the dismal possibility of separation thus presented to her mind, which made her unable longer to control her grief; for,

stifling her rising sobs, she removed the dear head from its now unquiet resting-place, and laying it softly down, where there was less likelihood of the sleeper being disturbed, she seated herself at a short distance, and gave way to the most touching demonstrations of her woe.

For the first time the prediction of Neria's mother presented itself to my mind in all its force; here was the sorrow of which she had warned her: there was no need to look for it further; and I believe that, even in the more vague apprehensions of the poor little Flower spirit, she did not fail to recognise, and bow before it. But would she in the midst of her despair have gone one step back from the path she had taken? Would she have shaped her course differently if, knowing all she now knew, the choice had been offered to her again? My friends, be assured she would not; she sat there and wept until the heart seemed to be melting within her, over a woe which at the moment she believed to be incurable; but though the lot she had chosen was one leading to death and despair, she preferred it still to all others in the world, and would have scorned to exchange it against the fairest and happiest, that ever was offered to a mortal. So strong is the bent of the gentlest heart,—it must be happy or miserable in its own wilful way.

When the first paroxysm of Neria's grief was at an end, and she was on the point of returning to her husband's side, her attention was arrested by a sound, unusual in that lonely place, as of some one approaching, cleaving the water at a rapid pace, which seemed to betoken much mental disorder. The little wife drew her nymph-like figure to its full height, and exhibited on her features more irritation than could have been expected from a creature so gentle, as she advanced and confronted Sundew, to whose further progress in that direction she barred the passage.

"Stand back, Sundew!" she exclaimed; "do not go near him, he is sleeping. Cruel, false maiden, — what is it you would have of Valis's wife?"

"I am come to throw myself upon your goodness," replied Sundew, bending forward and clasping her hands together, while her face flushed with excitement, and a something unusual and earnest in her manner, gave force to the supplication of her attitude: "to throw myself on your goodness," she continued, "and to ask your pardon for a great fault. I have been wanton, and cruel, and deceitful, but oh, Neria! when I tormented others I did not guess what pangs they might feel, — I knew not the nature of the things I played with, — I have learnt it now to my cost. Forgive, and do not turn away

from me utterly, — I am too wretched to be cast off by a heart so true !”

“Do not talk of sorrow,” said Neria, her grief overflowing at her eyes, in spite of her efforts to keep it back ; “you, who have never known love.”

“Love !” repeated Sundew with vivacity, as she shook from her brow the tangled locks, usually so soft and shining. “Do I not know it ? What is this that has transformed me ? What is this enemy which has stolen upon and disarmed me, leaving me unable either to fight or to fly ? Daughter of Valisneria, you should know love when you see it, — what is this that sits so strangely upon me ?” Neria looked, but said nothing. Sundew *was* changed, the expression of her face was by turns wild, and unspeakably soft and languid, and a neglect and disorder were observable in her appearance, opposed to all her former instincts ; but it was not thus that love had come to the gentle Neria, and she would have failed to recognise its presence in these strange manifestations.

“I do not wish you the ill you deserve,” she said, with growing impatience to be free of her strange guest ; “go home now, and leave us in peace.”

“Alas ! how is this ?” persisted Sundew, seizing her hand, and regarding her in the face for the first time in their interview ; “you have been

weeping, — are weeping now, — where is Valis? is he ill?”

“What matters that to thee?” retorted the unhappy wife, with a burst of uncontrollable grief.

“You hate me,” said Willy-nilly; “but I have learnt to weep, and will weep with you even against your will: you were once my friend, and shall be so now that I feel the want for the first time in my life. I too have been ill, but it is not of that I would speak; you, who have had experience of love and sorrow, must hear my story, and give me your advice.”

“You must be quick,” said Neria, turning to look at her sleeping lord; “for at his first movement I shall leave you.”

“He is sleeping,” said Sundew; “I will detain you but a moment. Listen; — I recovered from the effects of the wild dance in which your Valis had nearly put an end to my existence, and breaking from the circle of spiritless creatures who were repaying my ill offices with their officious attentions, — the foremost of them all being the gracious Bobadil” —

“Bobadil?” broke in Neria, — “your beloved!”

“My scorn, my derision,” resumed Sundew, impatiently: “I saw him through the eyes of fools, and now see him through my own. My

eyes have received new light since they looked upon him first. Oh, Neria! it is well for you that yours were blinded with love, or they must have betrayed your heart when they looked upon that transcendent image which appeared to take Bobadil's place in the dance. But I am wandering, and you are angry and impatient. I broke from these busy-bodies, and retired to a quiet spot, where I could meditate at my ease on the turn in my fate, which had made Bobadil a direct suitor for my hand, at a moment when my heart had been stormed by a random shot, cast from the eyes of an unknown stranger. Every voice within that wilful centre of consciousness, chimed out a negative for Bobadil. He was the same as he had ever been, — the admired, the followed, the flattered, and deferred-to, — it was in vain I repeated these facts to myself, — he was not the mate for Sundew. Thus thinking, I became aware that I was the object of the fixed regards of one, who overlooked me from his place on a stately bough, which rose and fell with a soft luxurious motion, as it met, and retired from, the cooling exhalations evaporated from the surface of the lake. I looked in turn, and beheld in the spirit who reclined at his sovereign ease against the tall, tapering spire of a chestnut-flower, the same who had condescended, at our revels so lately past, to come down from

his high place, and take part in our sports. The same blue eyes, sometimes fiery, sometimes mild and mocking, looked down upon me now, and pierced me through like winged darts. It was in vain I sought to rally my spirits, and practise upon him some of those arts of blandishment which I had found so successful with others, — not the youngest or shyest of the three sisters of Valis, could have found herself more timid or defenceless. Oh, Neria," continued the maiden, her breath coming thick and short as she proceeded, "did you ever know fear? Did you ever turn and creep within yourself, with your heart beating as if it would burst your bosom? Did you ever feel cold to your fingers' ends, and tremble while you forced yourself to seem calm, — and while all things in nature appeared revolving around you, as you stood confused in their midst? I felt it then; it is an exquisite sensation! Surpassing in pleasure all that I have ever experienced in inflicting the cruellest torments on others!"

"But this grand seigneur," interrupted Neria; "he is some prince or potentate of a foreign country; his birth, his habits, his associations, all different from yours."

"I know what you would say," resumed the other; "it is madness, and may end in my sorrow and ruin; but I listened to him then, and forgot

it all, — I forget it now, when I do but think on him. He spoke to me, as I stood trembling, of the passion he had conceived for me, — alas! with the air of one who did me honour by the avowal. My pride rebelled, but my love triumphed, and it was only the fear that he would despise me as too easily won, which induced me to seek refuge from his fascinations in flight.” Sundew went on to say, that on leaving the prince she had returned to her mother, and found the good lady in a state of great excitement and bustle, having been apprised by Bobadil of the decisive step he had taken, and already having commenced preparations for the joyful event which was to follow as a thing of course: that in the midst of her new emotions she had felt herself unequal at the moment to the task of undeceiving Zobeide, and acknowledging her own wild heart for the first time insufficient for her counsel, had resolved on seeking Neria, her injured friend, and pouring out a true tale into her sympathetic ear. Neria, in spite of her own sorrow, and her impatience to return to her beloved Valis, was deeply moved by the agitation and perplexity of her friend. There being so much in her case which reminded her of her own, she spared no simple art of eloquence of which she was mistress, to place before her her danger in the strongest colours, and gave her a store of the best advice, in default

of being able otherwise to serve her. Zobeide herself could not have argued the point with greater circumspection. She spoke of the barrier which existed between Sundew and this magnate of a foreign country, as not to be surpassed but by infringing the laws of Flower-land, and proceeded to touch movingly on the folly of indulging a hopeless passion. She then adverted to Bobadil, cast up his many substantial qualities, and implored her not to turn from a basis of ultimate satisfaction so prudent and solid, in pursuit of a phantom of ideal happiness. I thought it not altogether unworthy of remark, as I listened, that this heart which in its own case had shown itself as wilful as it was tender, should track out so uncompromising a chart, for the guidance of another's career.

Sundew looked very grave when she listened at first to these maxims of prudence; she had consulted Nöria, if the truth must be told, in preference to all others, because she felt sure that her advice would be congenial to her wishes. But the brow of Willy-nilly soon cleared, and a light sparkled in her black eyes, brighter than ever had beamed there before. She thanked her good little friend for her forgiveness, prayed to be commended to Valis, to whom she said she bore no ill-will, although he had nearly put an end to her life before its sweet hey-day had begun, thanked

her still more for her excellent advice, and departed on her way, as blithe as a butterfly, — because she had determined not to take it !

Nöria returned to her place at her husband's side, and sat down softly to watch over him while he was sleeping. A renewed and sharp pang shot through her heart as she looked upon his wan check ; but the little wife had entered into a sort of compact with herself after the last flood of tears she had shed, and the last handful of golden hair she had given to the wind and the stream, that she would indulge no further in sorrow than she could help ; and as if in instinctive fear that her lonely thoughts might overcome her once more, she arose and busied herself in giving such a smiling aspect to their new home, as Valis must remark with surprise and pleasure when he awoke. It seemed to me, that had she possessed the power, by arousing him to a wider sphere of interest, of withdrawing his thoughts even for a moment from their fervid concentration on herself, it had been well for him ; and I watched her with interest, as with a widely different motive, she was engaged in fitly arranging and beautifying all the objects that would meet his eye. She had been occupied but a short time on her labour of love, when she was recalled by the sound of her husband's voice, pronouncing her name in his troubled sleep. She was at his side in a moment,

and in the arms which he opened to clasp her. He respired a long breath, as he felt the reality of the delicate shape, and opening his eyes, seemed to absorb her in his gaze.

“Nëria, you are my Nëria,—you will not leave me?” he said, as he pressed her to him tremulously.

“No, no! I will not leave you, I will *never* leave you,” murmured the little wife, in an accent which bespoke the fulness of her intent.

“Have you thought of what I said, Nëria? — do you think that I shall die?”

She started back at the words, whose meaning, fraught with direst sorrow, had scarcely dared to reveal itself in her thought; the ready tears were again overflowing, and it was piteous to see her weep and beat upon her breast, then wipe her eyes with her streaming hair, and gaze into the face of her beloved, examining all its lineaments, and feeling them with her soft hands, as if to assure herself that he was bodily before her, and that there was no such fear of her losing him as was implied. Indeed, the long sleep of Valis had greatly refreshed him, and his improved looks aided the words with which he endeavoured to comfort and reassure the fair being whose life seemed bound up in his; so that after a time she was again herself, her fears pacified, and her hopes renewed. She now began to tell Valis

of the visit of Sundew, how that wayward spirit had been subdued by the power of love, what dangers menaced her from her unhappily placed affection, and how troubled and changed seemed the brilliant being, who had formerly sparkled but to destroy. Valis interrupted her to entreat that the interview which had just taken place between them should be their last; and backed his request with such instance, and moving entreaty, as made it indeed a command. Neria looked startled and puzzled, not knowing how to act. It was impossible for her long to refuse anything to her Valis's wish, but she listened to his request with a face in which all her struggling emotions were pictured as in a glass. There was tender recollection and sorrowful regret, and, stronger than all, there was a look of her old familiar but vague terror, as she felt perchance how her beloved was casting off, one by one, the links which should bind them to their kind. She made him understand that Sundew was unhappy, and in circumstances which rendered the support of one who loved her of value; she pleaded that she was so penitent for her past errors, and implored with uplifted hands to be allowed to retain this one friend, endeared to her by the associations of their early days. The small hours of the morning had been sometime past, and the chilliness of the air, as Neria bent

in supplication before her lord, was that which precedes daybreak. A silence as of death appeared to have spread over all nature : the flowers, dimly discernible in the distance, were reposing after their revels ; and the tribe of winged creatures which filled the air by day, had been asleep during the whole night season, which indeed, with many of them, was the half of a life. The abrupt and short sighs of the wind at this dead hour was all that was heard in concert with the pleading voice of Neria, and it rose, when she had ceased, into a sadder cadence, which seemed to my excited feelings as the voice of Doom, uplifted in the solemn echoes of a Greek chorus, recording its irrevocable decrees, putting its seal in a mournful " Amen " to the closing around these lonely lovers, of another link of that charmed circle, which shut them out from all the wholesome influences of the external world.

When Neria beheld the livid hue which her timid opposition had called up on the brow and cheek of Valis, when he sadly upbraided her with suffering this mischievous sprite to stand for a moment between two hearts united by ties so sacred as theirs, however her perceptions of the gathering evil may have been awakened, she was unequal to the task she had undertaken, and yielded the point to her headstrong lord, as a nurse of erring judgment and over-loving heart.

gives in to the humours of a petted child, while trembling lest it should be to his undoing.

But Neria, "a thing of beauty" as she was; was born to be a "joy for ever" to the one fond heart which possessed her so solely. Sorrow might fall upon her like rain upon the flower-vessel in which she sat floating on the wave, but as the sparkling drops rolled from off the smooth petals, and left them spotless as before, so the overwhelming tide, which from time to time broke over her spirit, receded, and left it buoyant and gay, though it laughed and struggled with some tell-tale tears, like a dewy rose in the sun.

She played about him now that the morning dawn began to flush the East and to colour the hopes that were battling with her despair, in an effervescence of delight which gathered fresh strength as she saw it communicated to her admiring Valis. She indulged in all manner of frolic motions, as graceful as they were fantastic, and to me at least original; and when Valis was charmed and hurried half out of his senses with rapture, she thought, poor short-sighted spirit, that she had achieved a great triumph in winning him from the contemplation of his ailment, and flew towards him to claim her repayment, in kisses he was so ready to shower upon the fair creature who was at once the bane and antidote of his existence. When she was tired, she sat

down at his side, and sung him, with her little fluty voice, songs of the loves and joys of Flowerland: there was no moment in which she did not do something to enchant him; yet he seemed to fade in spite of her loving efforts—alas! only the more surely for their lavish exertion.

They were now almost as isolated in their new home, as they had formerly been beneath that dark canopy which had been borne away from them by the storm. For every sympathy and influence of the outer world from which Valis succeeded in detaching his idol, he offered her a compensation in the ever-increasing absorption of his love. For every step deeper into the solitary entrenchment into which he forced her back through her fears for the consequences of her resistance upon him, he gave her her reward in the passionate devotion which became ever the more fervid as his strength declined. He was never weary of gazing at her in motion or at rest; when she paused in her tuneful strains, he caught them up, and sung her praises to the passing winds; while he fretted if they paused to look upon her in return. He could not bear her from his sight, his sleep was troubled if he could not feel her near; he sought for the object of her every look, and sometimes mistook it to her hurt and his own. He pined beneath the effects of his jealous fears in spite of all she could

do to appease them; yet not beneath these, which were the consequences, and not the cause, of the morbid operations which were sapping his life. Even the elastic spirit of Neria was often on the point of giving way beneath the alternate exactions, and abnegations of his love. He refused all the cares she would have lavished upon him, making use of them only as reminders of what he himself might bestow upon her; he bore her in his arms if she told him he was weary, and stayed awake to hush her when she prayed him to sleep; if she grew pale at the result of his wild paroxysms, he threw himself into fresh ones to engage her forgiveness; and, in a word, contrived so to baffle all the attentions which his state demanded, as to dispossess himself of everything, only to crush her beneath it, and to make her the more hopelessly miserable. And all the while that he was caressing, and carrying her about on the wild waves of his feelings, as the sea bears some tender and helpless shell, he never divined that there was a wound in her heart, which she covered in secret with pearly tears. For Valis, when nothing occurred to stir up his stormy nature, was happy—happy as he had been in the first fond hours of their love; he bore her here to himself, with scarce a creature looking upon her but the distant stars; he did with her as he listed; he played with and bore her about

as if she had no separate life from his own; and as he loved her with ever increasing devotion, he doubted not that she was as happy as he.

And yet there were moments when the feverish happiness of Valis suffered an eclipse, even as the buoyant gladness of his loving mate. At such times, it seemed to him that a veil had been drawn over the face of nature, and as if all its harmonies were out of tune.

"It is neither winter nor spring," he said to Neria, as this languor overcame him at the turn of the seasons, "the moon is set, and the sun not risen, the stars have gone out one by one in the sky, the blue looks cold overhead, and the blush of the morning is already faded. Come hither, thou only beautiful thing;—ah! Neria, even thy loveliness is dimmed!"

The little wife bent with a movement rapid as lightning, over the side of her vessel, and glanced at her image in the glassy lake. The face that met her there was pale and discomposed with the anguish to which she was a prey; but it was in vain she consulted the faithful mirror, the reflection gave back to her, whether fair or distorted, would still have seemed to her, what the original was to Valis,—the only glass which could ever gaze at her,—and to him it had lost the lustre of its beauty!

She wrung her hands in her helpless sorrow.

and wondered what had stoln the light from her eyes, and the bloom from her cheek, in which Valis had delighted.

"I am a wretch," he said, "to make you weep; your brightness is not quenched, but it is my shadow which falls over you."

Nëria caught up some water, which was soon mingled with tears, and hastily washing her face, turned to him, stroking the waving curls out of her hair in her endeavour to arrange it becomingly; and though she may have failed to heighten her beauty—which indeed had no need of improvement—by these artless devices, there was something so appealing in their manner and object, that it was impossible to behold them unmoved. The passionate approval she had been used to in his glances, was not to be read in them now, and even his expressions of regret at having pained her, partook of the languor which had seized upon his system. The unhappy little wife sat herself down to grieve in silence, and heedfully to minister to the wants of him she had lost for the moment the power to enchant; but she was soon called from her melancholy musings by a summons, which to her it had seemed impossible to resist.

The sun rose again upon the lake, more gloriously than ever, though it seemed otherwise to Valis, after the storm which had followed its setting, and the wild season which had been past

by the lovers in the interval. It was this, which summoned Neria to a sense of her obligations, and she began with a heavy heart, to engage in the duties of the diurnal spring. But how different were her motions to those, so gay and free, which had characterised the same process on the preceding day. She washed her fairy charge,—the flower to which her life owned so mysterious a connexion,—in the still over-shadowed water, and painted it afresh, in the mingled prismatic beams, till it glanced upon the wave, white and spotless as a fraction of stolen light. She next caught two rays in conjunction, a blue and a gold, which had fallen upon a feather of her downy wing, and with these she heightened the pattern upon the leaves, which she traced out and amended with dutiful care. Valis watched her now, as he had done the day before, but not, as then, with looks of admiring delight.

“Why leave me, Neria,” he said, “for these pitiful toils? What can they do for you: can they make you more pleasing to me? How can you so strive for the approving glance which the sun divides over the whole wide world, when you have a love so absorbing as that of your Valis for your portion?”

The heart of the poor Flower-spirit was almost sinking beneath its load. . She loved him so much, he looked so pale and worn, his high young head

sunning fire. The sorrow struggled rebelliously within her,—the sorrow she dared not make known, and he could not console,—the only one in all their twin days she had ever borne without him. She had not the courage to tell him of her agonising fears, to quench for ever the spark of joy which might again shine forth for a few brief moments; it seemed like confirming his doom: and then she had a hope,—a hope which had been born to her in the extremity of her despair,—a hope that she, poor sad little spirit, might yet accomplish something for his salvation.

CHAP. XII.

“Thou hast called me thy angel in moments of bliss,
And thy angel I'll be 'mid the horrors of this ;
Through the furnace unshrinking thy steps to pursue,
And shield thee, and save thee, — or perish there too.”
Thomas Moore.

As Neria had sat lonely and sad, defeated for the first time in her efforts to please her weary lord, her gaze had chanced to fall upon the water at her side, and piercing obliquely through its transparent depths, had settled upon a group of her Valis's kinsfolk of the Lake, who laughed and gambolled, and strove with each other beneath the wave, young and thriving, careless and free, and still attached to the parent stem. It was doubtless this chance encounter of her eyes, revealing to her the healthy and vigorous state of these youthful scions of her husband's stock, and the orderly conditions by which these blessings were maintained, which pressed more fully home to the soul of the drooping Flower-spirit, the knowledge that it was to Valis's infringement of these conditions, that all their sufferings were to be traced. Thus far had she arrived through the medium of her infallible instincts, but they

were insufficient further to inform her whether the relations from which Valis had rashly withdrawn himself, were susceptible of readjustment; and on this side she was open to the flatteries of hope. It seemed to her that if her beloved could be induced to return only for a while, to the place from whence he came, and renew from time to time, as his state might require, his interrupted connection with the fructifying soil, all might yet be well; and his occasional and temporary absence from herself, the sole compromise with their fate which would be required.

She now devoted herself, with the whole strength of the few faculties which went to her harmonious nature, to working out the project which had been thus suggested. She had learnt from Valis that his birth-time had been noon, and remembered that that had been also the period at which they had exchanged their first fatal glances. She proposed, on the recurrence of the approaching mid-day, to make him a *fête* so brilliant and beautiful, so fairy-like and calculated to take him by surprise, that he could not choose but be delighted, and startled, out of the lethargy which had stolen upon his senses. The only guests who were to share in the *fête*, were the three fair maidens of the Valisneria: being the only guests, as she knew full well, whose presence would be otherwise than displeasing to him on whose be-

half it was designed, and to whose humours every arrangement was to be subject. It was her instinct, again, which pointed to the sisters of Valis as likely to aid in the work she had in view, by bringing to the assistance of the overwhelming entreaties with which it was her purpose to assail him, the tender associations of the home of his youth. In the moment of awakened feeling for which she was preparing, when love and pleasure, gratitude and soft recollections, held sway over him, she would throw herself upon her knees, tell him of his danger, point in the same breath to the way by which he could escape from it, and adjure him by their love to leave her for a time, in order that they might not be separated for ever. • I will not say that these thoughts were unfolded at once to this Soul of a lily; it seemed to me as if they presented themselves one by one, as the time drew near when they were to be wrought into the action of her plot, and were only dimly perceived by her in the distance, as one may divine the length and direction of a chain held by a single link from the nature of its vibrations.

She clung to her design with the tenacity of a last hope, and worked at its completion while Valis slept. One thing at a time, and everything in order, was her simple *modus operandi*; it seemed as if a spirit not her own, had entered

into the gentle being so formed for happy love, and sportive ease, and was leading her on in her more complicated way. While she hovered over Valis in every waking moment, and sought to amuse and to win him from himself, she saw the light fading from his eye, and the colour from his cheek, even as she looked, and it hurried her on to fresh exertions, so soon as his slumbers had left her at liberty.

Their present home was situate, as I have before had occasion to remark, at a distance from the flowery throng who carried on the pleasure and the business of their lives in concert, on that portion of the lake to which the kind reader was first introduced. It was a safe retreat, sheltered even from the motion with which the wind curled the water, being close to the margin, and walled in from behind, by the curved portion of a marble pediment, from which the shaft, probably of some ruined temple, had fallen years gone by, and had left no further trace even of its decay. This curve, which had probably indented an angle of the ruined pediment which had abutted on the lake, it must be borne in mind, was a concave one, and formed a sort of bay for the troubled spirits which had there sought refuge from their kind. Time had furnished the stone which rose behind them in a semicircle, with lichens and moss, while leaves and grasses closed it in on either side;

but the colours looked dull and unvaried, to the eyes of those, who were accustomed to the brilliant convocations to which every one present contributed his portion of splendour; and it was to rectifying this defect, that the chief efforts of Neria were directed. She once more spread out her wings for a palette, and dipped her pencil into the burning spots where the rays of the sun made their sweet alliances.

“He will no longer miss their brightness,” she murmured, as she busily pored over her task, and transferred the glowing colours to the lichens and delicate leaves, until the wall blazed forth into a garden; “he will not miss their brightness, and if he should, he will grieve the less when we part!” As the work of the nymph went forward, her fast descending tears covered it as with a shower of fine rain, and added the last touch to its completed beauty.

It now only remained to conceal it from the eyes upon which it was to burst in awakening surprise, and to this end our fair spirit succeeded in enlisting the services of some humble friends, who had a colony near, undeterred by the loneliness of the spot, and who were justly famed for their ingenuity and resource. Thus far had the operations of the sorrowful little wife been successful: that which was still to be compassed, was without the reach of her own control, and she

began to entertain many and uneasy doubts, as time passed on, of finding a safe and proper messenger to whom she could confide a mission on which she regarded the whole success of her enterprise as depending.

The difficulty which now presented itself was that of communicating with the sisters of Valis: to go herself was simply impossible, and she and Valis were so cut off from all intercourse with the world, had dwelt in its midst so like creatures of another sphere, that her thoughts could not light upon one of their former acquaintances who was likely to appear within the given time, and accept the office of messenger. It was thus clear that her only chance lay, in engaging the assistance of one of those winged busy-bodies whom of old times she had seen so familiar with Sundew, but who usually passed by Valis and herself, as creatures without the pale of their sympathy. One after another of these, as the day advanced, approached within reach of her signals; but while her hopes were kept alive, her mortification and misery were increased by the circumstance, as, unable to elude the watchful gaze of Valis, she was compelled to allow them to pass unchallenged. It appeared to her that she had waited a weary while before the opportunity, and one of the creatures upon whom she depended to expedite her measures, presented themselves together; she seized the favourable

occasion, beckoned him towards her, and gave him the message, which she prayed him instantly to deliver, and was so pale and tearfully earnest as she did so,—committing, as she felt herself to be, the last of her wifely hopes to his keeping, — that he pledged himself to seek out the sisters without a moment's delay, or suffering himself to be allured by any temptation which might present itself on his way to them. It was perhaps well for the little spirit that—her pretty toils complete—she had had this second call upon her thoughts; for had they clung incessantly around the pale image of Valis, all her constancy might have failed to support her, until the crisis of her fate should arrive. Her husband had said “I die for your love!” and it was the very core of her heart's sorrow, that she could never behold his wasted form, without feeling that it was she who had tempted him to his doom.

In the meanwhile time was moving onward, and Neria, thrilling in every fibre of her frame, with the hopes and fears which were contending within her, awaited the return of the messenger who had promised to bring word of the approach of the young sisters.

The hour of mid-day was almost come, and still her messenger had not returned; but Neria, remembering how true he had looked, did not doubt that he had faithfully performed her errand.

Crouched down by her Valis's side, she looked in his face, and sought to gather in its attenuated lineaments some food for her trembling hopes. She herself was flushed and excited, and he marked the heightened colour, and lustrous eyes, which recalled to him his young wife as he had known her in their first beloved home, with feelings of deep delight. Indeed they derived mutual comfort from this silent perusal of each others' glances; for Valis was more himself than he had appeared for long before, and his little wife was fain, as she regarded him, to cover her face in her hands, lest he should read her hopes in her newly dawning smiles, and the secret she had found it so difficult to keep back. But with the thought of this secret, came that of the parting which was involved in it, and before which her very hopes themselves grew pale and threatening, so that she drooped her head now to conceal her tears, as she had done before to cover her smiles. She would gladly have hidden both in the arms of her Valis, but the thought that they must part, held her rooted to her place: sunk on her knees, and with averted face, she resisted his efforts to take her to his heart, trembling to awaken feelings which might serve at this moment to frustrate the designs, in which lay their only, but melancholy hope.

Seeing nothing in the conduct of his fair little

mate but an impulse of playful perversity, Valis gazed on the deceptive brightness of the cheek, which her small hands left revealed to him, while his own seemed to kindle in sympathy; he threw off the languor which had so long oppressed him, and warmed into new life as he sung of her beauty, her sweetness, her worth, and recounted all that she had been to him. I say that he sung of this, for it is true that he did so: he commenced his rhapsody in simple words, but the thoughts which prompted them were so fervid, that they soon resolved themselves into measure, and thence broke into song. She suffered him to proceed unchecked; his blessings and praises, unwitting all for which she had lately been striving, were a sweet reward she had not the power to refuse, and one that was the more precious, in that it was shortly to be broken in upon, by the opening of the day's proceedings. His voice grew fainter, but his passionate strain continued, when Nerin was startled from her rapt attention by three light taps on her shoulder, and stealing a glance behind her, beheld her so long-expected messenger. She hurriedly whispered to Valis that she must leave him, and, playfully closing his eyes, bade him keep them so until her return; then following her winged courier where they were not likely to be overheard, she learnt with satisfaction that he had discovered the young sisters, had delivered her

message, and was the herald of their speedy arrival. She had thanked him, and given him his reward in a draught of the nectar contained in an urn within the flower of which she was the guardian, and was returning to Valis, to wait the moment of his sisters' appearance, when she was alarmed to find him standing before her.

If she had often before this moment beheld him pale, he was now ghastly; he was so little like the husband of her love, that it seemed to her as if Valis must have expired in that moment, and a demon taken possession of his frame. His face was set as in a convulsion; his eyes alone gave evidence of conscious life, and they seared the heart of his quailing wife with a look of the direst hatred. His form was erect, every muscle and fibre held in tension, his clenched hands pressed down to his sides. He stood before her dreadful in his accusing wrath; he looked her down as a guilty thing that he had warmed and cherished in his bosom, and that had turned upon, and wounded him, to the death.

Nëriā saw him, and at that single glance every fragile hope she had been striving to build up, crumbled down into ruins at her feet; they were like mortal relics exhumed from the grave, which vanish at the touch of a single breath. A death-like collapse passed over her face, her limbs

gave way beneath her, and she sank down overcome by the fatal shock.

Valis stamped in his rage and agony, until the water trembled all around them.

“Hold, hold!” he cried, “not a word, you can charm vipers when you speak. I have found you, traitress! cunning deceiver! Wife, love, life, madness! all is fading from my grasp—I lose all!”

With the shame and shrinking fear with which she regarded the fond devices she had sought to oppose against imperious doom, there was not wanting to Neria in this terrible moment, something of that courage with which the weakest become armed in the presence of the inevitable.

“Yes, Valis,” she faltered in reply to his ringing words, “all is lost! I am but as a waif on the stream, a sport for the summer breeze, but I have been true to thee! I am a weak and worthless thing,—I cannot save thee, adored as thou art,—but you shall love me to the last!”

She sprang up, trembling as she was, and tore down the cobweb folds which had covered her loving toil from his sight; she had looked for a brighter moment in which the fairy work should be revealed. Alas! her erring hopes, leading her beyond the limit where her perceptions were infallible, had been a delusion wrought out of the fever of her despair. “Look there, cruel, be-

loved Valis," she exclaimed, as she threw herself fearful into his arms, "it was all for you! I would have made you a *fête* which should have diverted your thoughts, if even for a time, from your hapless idol; I would have recalled to your side your sisters; I would have had you seek — incited by our prayers — to renew the ties you had broken for me. It seemed to me that in yielding something, I might not yet lose all. The messenger you saw was one who had spoken with our sisters, — see there, they are approaching, but it avails us nothing. Valis it might not be, all is over, — let us rest!"

"Let us rest!" repeated Valis. "Oh, my Neria, Oh my wife, — there is rest for thee, but for me nevermore! You have been my joy, my comforter, my charmer, my earthly star, which has shone brighter for me than all that have looked down upon us from above; while I have made your torment, your sorrow, your oppressor, the weight upon your light heart, and the clog on your bright wings. I have been as a shadow on your destiny, and a stumbling-block in your path, and while I would have yielded my life in exchange for your lightest wish, I have given you only evil for good, and heaviness for the gladness I have received. And with all this, and more, I have loved you, — Oh Neria, I *have* loved you, — your own heart can hardly measure the love of

your Valis! And now my time's drawing to an end, and I leave you in my death, as I have given you in my life, mourning and heaviness for your portion,—for, Neria, you will grieve for me,—I should but mock you in bidding you forget me,—you will grieve for me, little one, so long as your true heart beats, for your love is co-equal with your goodness, and not with your Valis's deserts." The dying Flower-spirit would have talked thus for long, his voice growing ever fainter and softer, but his adoring mate, in whose eyes there was kindling a light which spread as a glory over her gentle face, interrupted him.

"Speak not thus to me, my husband and only love!" she said, as she crept closer to his heart, "life would have been a worthless gift to thy Neria, but for thee. Tell me not of wrongs that you have done me,—but for you had I never known happiness! It is I who have done evil to thee, and have a heavier wrong on my soul than the greatest of thine! It is I who have decoyed thee, and have taken thy beautiful life. But time is short,—too short for vain regrets, yet not for one last look of happiness!"

"Oh, Neria!" murmured Valis, clasping her still closer, "I must weep, I must regret,—we *part*! I am unworthy of thee, and am cast down from the heaven which love had made for me!" His arms closed upon her with the weight of stone.

“No, no!” cried Neria, “we shall not part; we are one; what is death that it should divide us?” There was a wild triumph in the voice, and a wild joy in the heart, of the trembling spirit, so exalted by her love; she wound her arms about him, she pressed herself to his side, she showered down kisses upon his lips, his eyes, his brow, the tokens of her love which had been so long restrained.

He murmured still—words of the fondest endearment—words which sound extravagant when calmly recalled, but which are all too inadequate in moments, and in natures such as these. She caught them no longer in his dying accents, but she knew their import. The water mounted higher and higher, and was gurgling around them.

Still paler and paler grew the face of Valis, and the lips with which he uttered inarticulate words; and still closer was the clasp of his heavy arms over the unresisting form of Neria. The sky appeared to be receding as they looked: the noon-day sun, and the trees which were weeping over them—they were leaving them all. The three fair sisters were approaching the spot. Neria waved them a smiling farewell, and then turned from them, from the sky, from the sun, and the whole bright world, to her dying lord. He was cold, and still, and marble pale, but his heart was yet beating, and his eyes were fixed on her.

“It is dark,” he murmured, “cold and dark, dear love. Come closer, for I cannot see thee,—let me warm thee in my heart; thus, thus,—darkness shall not harm thee, cold shall not reach thee here!” One happy bound of his faithful heart, as he pressed her more closely against it, and Valis was at peace for ever from his stormy joys and sorrows.

The weight of the lifeless arms still pressed upon the widowed Nöria, as her tears flowed over his inanimate breast. Deeper and deeper they drew her down into the lake; he had sunk beneath the waters, they now flowed over her, they wetted her hair, they drenched her garments, they deafened, they blinded her, they mingled with her tears, and finally closed over, and made her a quiet grave, where she reposed for ever in the arms of her beloved.

Their requiem was the solemn chorus of the wind, which, as it swept over the place where they had been, murmured for ever to those who comprehended its strain, the story of the life, love, and death, of these two fair Spirits of the Lake.

I know not how I came to the knowledge of the subsequent history of Sundew, Bobadil, and Zobcide, for after Valis and Nöria had vanished

from their places on the lake, I had little heart to prosecute my researches amongst the rest of its fantastic denizens. But in some manner, however incomprehensible to myself, I became possessed of the events which succeeded to, or had been coeval with, those I have related, my friends who have accompanied me thus far in my narrative, have a right to expect some further intimation concerning them.

Sundew, as was to be inferred from one of her wayward temper, had again ventured within the sphere of those fascinations she had felt herself powerless to resist; and as a bark in the whirl of an eddy, had been drawn ever more deeply into the power of the spells of the chestnut blossom. It was not long before the gay coquette was missing from the circle of which she had made so dazzling an ornament. A rumour passed round it, that Sundew was dead; and eyes were raised, and heads shaken, as if a calamity which, in all its varied forms, was so common among these fairy people, could only have become the portion of Willy-nilly, as a judgment on her malice and perversity.

But the rumour which had been thus interpreted, was a false one; she was still to be reckoned among the living, though eking out a sad sort of "life of grace," as dependent on the whims and caprices of her tyrant, as others had

ever been on her. In truth, Sundew had spoken more truly than she was aware of, in telling Bobak that to love wildly was a part of her nature: little Neria, with her adoring blue eyes, had not been more completely the slave of her own emotions than this sparkling coquette, who, when "fancy free," had spread terror and devastation, through the Land of Flowers.

She bore the subjugation of her spirit with the sullen humility of a slave, and of herself would have continued to bear it to the end. She had fretted against the yoke, but it had bound her hand and foot; till, weary and weak with the long struggle, her hopes wasted, her beauty faded, her youth consumed, she received from her lover, in a heartless dismissal, the freedom she had been unable to work out for herself, and returned sick and sad to the scenes of her youth.

When she appeared once more in her old home, — dropped from the withering eminence of a power she had not been formed to share with her imperious ruler, — so changed was she, so subdued her vital energies, that she might have passed as a stranger among those who had known her in her youth; and indeed she would have chosen this course as more consonant to her feelings, had not the loud denunciations of Zobeide against her oppressor, removed the faintest hope of preserving such a secret.

Zobeide had bitterly bemoaned her disappointment in being compelled to forego such a son-in-law as Bobadil. The good little dame had been so thoroughly acquainted with her daughter's whimsical nature, that at no time had she given in to the current belief in her death; and her maternal experience, leading her much nearer to the truth, had given a check to her sorrow, which she further assuaged by holding a sort of "wake," or assembly of her gossips, at which the new trinkets and gewgaws of the missing bride elect were exhibited, and her conduct, and the trouble she had caused Zobeide from her birth, were commented upon by that talkative lady. • The new anxieties attendant on the bringing out into society of her remaining daughters, soon acted as a yet more complete distraction to her lingering regrets; and as the young *débutantes*, though almost as coquettish, and not quite as handsome as their sister, were far more prudent and tractable, she yielded herself up to the most flattering hopes of their probable advancement in life, in the regular line of ~~residually~~ preferment.

As none of these cares, however engrossing they may have been, had quite caused the absent Sundew to lose her place in the maternal regard, her return, all saddened and bereft as she was, made a fête-day for the better feelings in the nature of each.

The only differences which henceforward ever occurred between these two spirits, were touching the education of the youthful sisters; Willy-nilly, who was both fond and proud of them, holding that the system adopted in regard to them by their mother, was too relaxed. The former coquette was for substituting in place of it, the most restrictive tactics; for watching them with a vigilance which was wounding to the feelings; and demanding of them a gravity and precision of deportment, at variance with the gaiety of their years.

Not long after the disappearance of Sundew and the lovers, Bobadil the Bee-king had taken a third decisive step on the road which should conduct him to matrimony, and had made his advances to the gentle eldest sister of the Valisneria, with greater humility and observance than he had thought necessary on former occasions. On the desertion of Sundew, he had dropped for a while into a state of total insensibility; but it was so great a pleasure to find out, on his recovery, that he had actually been capable of suffering so much, that I doubt if he would not have gone through the whole programme again, with the assurance of the same agreeable awakening.

It was at this juncture that his mother became urgent in her entreaties that he should look out to himself a helpmate; and as emotions of some

sort had, in the experience of the Bee-king, ever appeared to attend upon such a quest, he consented the more readily to start upon it again, and was rewarded by as confiding and tender a little wife as ever fell to the lot of a fisher, and by the discovery of some warm domestic instincts in himself, of which he had never suspected the existence.

So ended my wanderings among the spirits of the lake. As I have before remarked, I could scarcely tell through what avenue of sense, or in what order, I became possessed of the knowledge of the things I have recounted: all I know is, that before I awakened to my own accustomed life, the last sound of which I was conscious, was the gurgling of the water as it closed over Neria's bright head, and the last feeling, in sympathy with hers, the weight of Valis's lifeless arms, as they bore her down living to the grave.

CHAP. XIII.

“Something between a bubble of the stream, —
A sleeping thought, or a waking dream.”

•Walter Scott.

“THE crisis is ~~past~~, — she is saved!” pronounced a grave voice which sounded close at my side. I perceived then that I had been weeping violently; for my cheeks were wet with tears which I felt unable, perhaps too weak, to wipe away. I heard a murmur around me as of whispering voices, and persons moving to and fro; and still I was sensible of a weight like that of arms which were clasping me, but was unable to separate what was real from that which was illusive in my position. I opened my eyes, and looked upwards, to take in the blue sky flickering between the waving branches of the birch tree, but beheld only curtains, and the canopy of a bed. I bent my looks downwards, where I thought to see the flowery mead, and the glassy surface of the lake; and they were met by two eyes which seemed to question mine with feelings of mingled ecstacy and fear. Was it another vision which rose before me, or was it indeed my husband who was pressing me convulsively in his

arms, and was grown haggard and wild in his aspect, and older by years in the space of a single dream? It was no second illusion of my senses; it was indeed my Sydney who was before me. I lay upon a bed of sickness, which had been like to have become one of death, and had been saved from the very jaws of the grave.

A fortnight later I was sitting beside my husband in an upper apartment of the château commanding the view I have attempted to describe, and was rejoicing in that feeling of newness of life which is so exquisite a sensation in convalescence, as almost to compensate for what we have suffered in sickness. During the long period in which all continuous speech had been forbidden to me, I had pondered much upon the subject of my delirious fancies, and had drawn from them deductions which I hoped might serve as guides to a new era of our lives. I longed impatiently to make my husband a sharer in my thoughts, and felt that no future occasion could be equal to the present, when something of the shadow of the death I had been so near, might seem to linger about me, and give force to my words. The assurance that his love for me had received no vital check, which I had gathered from such agony at the prospect of my loss as had caused those around him to feel alarm for his senses if not his life, and the certainty that that love was at the present moment all that it had

ever been, inspired me with the joyful confidence necessary to the fulfilment of my task; and I recounted to him, while it was yet fresh in my mind, and while my own feelings in the application gave an eloquence to my words which I have in vain endeavoured to recall in these pages, the story of the loves of the Valisneria.

“Listen to me still,” I pursued, when I had brought my narrative to an end; “wisdom, directed by a divine hand, has come to me in sleeping. Do you see nothing in the fate of these Flowers which corresponds to the history of our love? Such a fate is daily accomplished to them, if not quite in the manner I have described;—the circumstance which my fancy has so strangely overwrought, is a familiar fact in nature. One of these lilies tears itself from its root in the soil, and ascends to the surface of the water, to bloom and, as a consequence of its rash devotion, to wither and die beside its mate. That which is life to them, Sydney, is simply love to us. May we not be said to have torn its roots from the soil when we isolated ourselves from all active sympathy with our kind, and narrowed our sphere of duties and interests, attempting to dwell—detached from all others—in a region to which we may indeed make blessed flights, but which is above the level of a mortal resting-place? You did not hear our cousin Mary say, in alluding to the checks upon

their continued intercourse, that *‘they could but indulge in a summer day’s ramble, over the Elysian fields in which we dwelt continually.’* Those words sunk deep into my heart as she spoke them. It is too true, O my beloved! we have made that the business of life, which was meant only for its ornament, and its solace, and might have learnt in time that that highest privilege and crown of our mortal existence might, degraded from its allotted use, have made us heavier and more weary days, than ever could have come from wholesome toil in the discharge of duties however homely. You are too gifted, I too young, to make it just to others or ourselves that we should pass our lives in a tedious case, living for ourselves alone in the world, and for a love which is destroyed by the sacrifices which are made for its indulgence. All the life of a man is before you — my dearest love, I am very weak, and perhaps childish in my fears, — alas! I do not covet a career of ambition even for you who are so endowed for its success — it is a rival from which I own I shrink. ‘I do not ask for you greater honours,’ I resumed, taking courage from his glance, “than such as must spring from the worthy upholding of the name you bear. But I would have you employ your energies and talents, in a way which might be acceptable to your Creator, and bring you the applause of your own conscience, and of all good men. To return to

the comparison from which we set out, I would have you strike your roots deep and broad into the soil of our native land, taking heed for its widows and orphans, and nobly fulfilling that part in it which your position must always assign to one who is willing to accept it, — that so you may flourish as a willow by the water-course, not languish as a bubble on the stream. No no! I wish not that you may be great, I desire only that you should be happy, beloved, — and, oh, Sydney! for ever loving. In all this I perhaps am selfish; I would not choose you a portion in this life which should contain within itself its whole reward — not one which should resound in the voice of thousands — not one which should steal away the faintest portion of the heart I would call my own — not one which should demand another recompense than such as could be found in your own heart and in mine! Sydney, I argue as a woman; I begin, not at the edge of my circle, but in the centre, and extend my sphere from that as I go. In order that you might the better love me, I would have you love mankind. The happy multitude are better cared for than we who are called the favoured ones of fortune. They have enforced duties which they do not love, or at best can love but coldly, and return after a day of toil, to a home which beckons them as a paradise, and a wife who seems worthy of it in her welcoming

smiles. The rich, who have few of what are called cares allotted to them, and can easily escape even their duties by paying for their performance, must create them both if they would not grow weary or worthless !”

“I understand you, oracle that you are !” cried my husband bending over me with tearful eyes ; “those endowed as we are, if they would not be less happy than others, must be wiser as well as more wealthy ; lest, failing that, the gifts which obtain for them the envy of the lowly, entitle them to the pity of all. But you have talked fully enough for one day ; and I must stop your lips with your Valis’s receipt, — who by the by you appeared to think so very amiable, in spite of his errors and mistakes, that I am more than half inclined to take a leaf out of his book, and become fantastically jealous. Fear not, my Kate,” he continued, returning to the tone of deeper feeling with which he had commenced, “that to you alone this lesson has been sent. True guardian spirit and prophetess that you are, the wisdom that shall serve us both has been revealed to you. It was I, your husband, who should have been the guide of your youth ; I was not worthy, and my failure has been mercifully atoned for. I have humbly learnt what I should have gently taught ; that I have done so effectually, let my life be witness !”

I have but a few words to add to the foregoing. The following Christmas-eve saw all our party reunited at Oakenshaws, with others unknown to this history, whom that festive season never failed to assemble around the hospitable board of my parents. Having assisted by our presence at a feast of the tenantry and retainers, we were now, according to the simple and jocund taste which prevailed at such periods in my early days, speeding the merry hours among ourselves, with Christmas games, for which the presence of children offered but a bare, though at the same time a welcome excuse.

I fear that while I ran hither and thither with the others, old and young, I was but an absent participator in all this mirth; for Sydney had departed the day before on a self-imposed mission, and had not yet returned. He had gone, if not to light up the torch of festivity, at least to kindle a genial blaze, on many a hearth which but for him had been desolate; and my heart swelled with joyful pride when I thought of the added lustre these distant firesides would give to his own when he regained it. The few now living whose years will admit of their looking back so far into the past, will scarcely fail to remember the unusual severity of the winter of 1799, and the distress arising from this and other causes, which was so general amongst the agricultural population throughout our land.

The game of hide and seek had been for some time past, furnishing amusement to spirits already attuned to gaiety, when it became my turn to disappear into some one of the mysterious recesses of the old house. I ran away laughing as I bethought me of an old oaken bureau, known to be always locked, but to which, in expectation of such a contingency, I had provided myself with a key. It had been formerly used as a press for linen, but being now past general service, contained upon its shelves only a few musty heirlooms, as it stood in a passage communicating between the front and back staircase. It was adown this passage, as I waited in my place of concealment, that I had soon the satisfaction of hearing the whole party trooping in noisy disorder. Their voices and laughter had scarcely died away in the distance, as they departed by way of the back staircase, when I heard a well-known tread mounting the front one, by two or three steps at a time; and advancing my face from between the oaken doors, I beheld—with a joyful bound of the heart at the welcome vision—my husband hurrying away to his dressing-room, to change his discomposed attire. Hearing me whisper his name from my hiding-place, he turned and flew in a moment to the spot, threw off his snowy over-coat and wrappings, and, appreciating at once the drollery and opportuneness of the situation, stepped into the old bureau by my side, and,

ascertaining that we were likely to be left uninterrupted for at least some minutes to come, began to converse to me about the thousand and one important nothings, which the presence of a third party deprives at once of their charm. In this manner it is not surprising that time should float by unperceived; and perhaps little more so that, when one of the scouts of the patrolling party wandered by our hiding-place alone, we should be so little aware of his vicinity as to continue our whispered discussion, and thereby betray a position, which we need only have surrendered at pleasure.

The triumphant shouts of our young discoverer soon brought the rest of the party to the spot; and hearty was the laughter which the conjugal *tête-à-tête* elicited at our expense.

"My dear," said my father, detaining me behind the rest, and laughing until the tears were in his kind eyes, "I was afraid that in Italy, by over-much care, you were killing the goose which had laid the golden eggs; but you have managed to restore it—you best know how: take heed what you do for the future!"

The paternal caution was unnecessary. My Sydney, once fully awake to truths which it had been my blind good fortune to unveil to him, had launched his high faculties at once upon a career of usefulness, and found his resolution to persevere strengthened from day to day, by

the many calls which gathered and flocked around him from without; so that it appeared as if in effect the *first* was the only voluntary step he had had occasion to make, the others falling in rank and file, and urging him on in the path he had begun.

They were sweet labours in which we were thus associated, and, endearing us to each other a thousandfold, bore blessed fruits even for ourselves.

My Sydney is gone where I soon hope to join him. He has left a name unrecorded in the written annals of this world, except on one simple marble tablet, and in these poor pages which I am bringing to an end; but it lives in the grateful remembrance, of many a humble heart, and, better still, in the healthy, though unseen workings, of many a social change in his native Shire. Our great poet has told us, that

“Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which by much increase doth expand to naught.”

So is it not with the efforts of a good spirit, in a high and righteous cause. Though the name of him who bears it may be forgotten at his death, though no noisy fame may be his portion in life, the seeds of the good he has sown among men, shall live on to bear fruits to after generations — the worthiest record, all silent though it be, that a mortal can leave of his existence.

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